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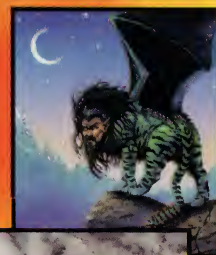


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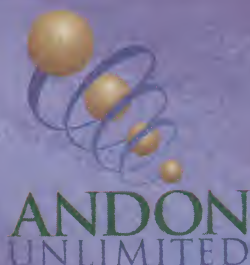
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Issue #25  
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*Breaking news, reviews, and similar good stuff.*

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Susan Van Camp brings us  
the chase scene on this  
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understand the rider's  
irritation—tailgaters annoy  
me too.



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The staff of SHADIS is determined  
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Although the Alderac  
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This policy actually penalizes AEG  
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policy demonstrates our determination  
to keep SHADIS truly independent.



# Editorial

## In Which We Cast the Net Again

Last month I mentioned the roleplaying resources which were available out on the net. This month, I thought I'd turn my attention to the computer itself. It's been brought to my attention that it's possible to play games directly on the computer itself — who would have thought?

Since we already have several pages devoted to reviews of commercial products, I thought I'd mention a couple of my personal favorites which meet three important criteria:

- They're widely available; i.e., most online services and FTP sites have them.
- They're not platform specific — while I am a big Macintosh fanatic, I realize that the odds are about eight or nine to one against me.
- They're free.

With those three restrictions in mind, here are a couple of oldies-but-goodies, holdovers from the Mainframe Era when dinosaurs walked the earth, which are nonetheless still intriguing enough to hold your interest.

### Zork Adventure Game

Yes, *that* Zork. This is the original version of the classic text adventure, ported from MDL to DEC FORTRAN to Unix f77 to C to your Macintosh or PC. This is the text adventure which (split into three parts and somewhat expanded) launched Infocom I, these many years ago. It's still free.

There isn't much I can say about this game that everybody doesn't already know. It's the second-oldest important text adventure (ADVENT begat Zork, *née* Dungeon, which begat a bunch of other adventure games down to the present-day *Myst* and *Leisure Suit Larry XLII*). You start up the game, and there you are outside the big white house next to the leaflet-bearing mailbox.

All of the standard adventure-game suggestions apply: Map obsessively. Try everything, especially silly things. Don't ask for help until you are absolutely out of ideas. Oh, and of course, watch out for grues.

### Angband Dungeon Crawl

Angband is the latest in a long and honorable line of Tolkien-inspired, ASCII-based adventure games. It is directly descended from *Moria*, and related by blood to *nethack*, *Larn*, *Omega*, and *rogue*. For those who don't recognize any of these names, here's a short summary of all of them: you're represented onscreen by a unique ASCII graphic (in Angband, for instance, you look like this: @). You move yourself around with various one- and two-keystroke commands, and with other keystrokes you haggle with shopkeepers in the town to outfit yourself with armor, weapons, and a vast array of magical toys. You then descend into a dungeon to commit mayhem upon its denizens and loot their bodies. Yes, it's just like roleplaying used to be, only one-on-one with the computer.

If you've never played any of these games, there is a fairly steep learning curve which the manual alleviates but does not eliminate. Angband is best learned with an experienced person around to teach you how to get started and answer questions. However, once you're into it, it becomes easily as addictive as Tetris, or caffeine, or trading-card games. (It was, for instance, a root cause of several flunk-outs at my alma mater. A word to the wise.)

These days, Angband does have an FTP site (<ftp://export.andrew.cmu.edu/angband/>), a Web page (<http://www.voicenet.com/~benh/Angband/>), and a Usenet newsgroup ([rec.games.roguelike.angband](http://rec.games.roguelike.angband)) in case you get stuck, need advice, or just want to marvel at the huge number of different computers this thing will run on.

There is a huge amount of free and inexpensive software available on the net, and with America Online scattering free-startup disks like dandelion seeds, it's easier than ever to get at it. Just don't be surprised when you hear yourself say, "OK, it's four A.M., but I can make thirty-fifth level if I just take out one more Ancient Multi-Hued Dragon..."

— D. J. Trindle

"It's been brought to my attention that it's possible to play games directly on the computer itself — who would have thought?"



# DÉJÀ VU

## There's No Place Like Home

**D**éjà Vu is a story that utilizes the settings and conspiracies presented in the *Over the Edge* role-playing game published by Atlas Games. If you don't own a copy, don't worry; you won't need it to run this story.

The city of The Edge (where this little tale takes place) is on a small island called Al Amarja, which lies just south and a little east of Italy. The whole place is a kind of weirdness magnet that attracts all sorts of strange activity. The beauty of *Over The Edge* is you can run just about any game you want on Al Amarja because the game is about the setting, not the system. The intent of *Déjà Vu* is to bring a group of characters to Al Amarja without their players knowing about it. Since the game system of OTE is completely supplemental to the setting, it doesn't matter what kind of system you use when you run this story. With this understanding, it should be easy to get your players to roll up any old characters with any old system they want, and then — quite suddenly — when they find themselves in the wild world of Al Amarja, they'll never be able to leave... even if they wanted to.

### Prelude

Sit down with your players and invite them to create characters for your favorite game system. Go through all the motions of creating the characters with them, but all the while, keep looking out of the corner of your eye for ways to get them in trouble. Find ways to get them in contact with power conspiracies. One way to do

this is to make sure that every one of them has a "Dark Secret", that is, something about their character that should never be revealed. Also, make sure that each of them has a detailed list of three close friends for their character. Then, sit down and give each of these "close friends" a Dark Secret. This gives you four excuses to get their character into trouble. The theme here is Conspiracy (if you haven't figured that out by now) and

you are going to want to get them embroiled in as many as possible.

The characters your players make could be from any role-playing setting: dark future, modern horror, science fiction or even fantasy. The further away they are from the modern setting of OTE, the more challenging the transition will be, but



By  
**John Wick**

Illustrated  
by  
**Brad  
McDevitt**



## Advanced Technology

Now if all this super-science doesn't fit in your campaign, don't sweat it. There are plenty of conspiracies on the island who have very valid reasons for having such advanced technology. But for right now, all the characters need are clues to their captor's identities. Besides, there are so many reasons why your party could get shanghaied, I wouldn't dream of limiting your imagination.

"challenge" is a GM's middle name, so deal with it. The way I play-tested *Déjà Vu* was by using the GURPS rules. I invited the players to write themselves up as GURPS characters without telling them the genre. I left clues all around: my *Call of Cthulhu* book by my bed and my GURPS: *Illuminati* by my writing desk were ample red herrings. I even left my video copies of *The Prisoner* lying around to throw them off the trail. By the time I was done with them, they didn't know what was going to happen. That's just the way I like 'em.

After you've created the characters together, get them started on your basic stock "adventure." The best way to do this is to get a published adventure and start running it. Run it straight for about two or three sessions, just long enough for them to get interested in the plot, and when you run that third session (I found that's just about the time everyone gets real interested and the Monty Python references dwindle to a minimum), take extensive notes on everything they do. Make sure that you write down as much as possible so you would be able to run the exact same session again if you had to.

Why?

Because that's exactly what you're going to do.

## The Beginning

As I said above, make sure that you duplicate the session as much as possible. Your players will obviously take note of the fact that they've flashed back for some reason and will begin to ask questions like: "Hey, didn't we do this last week?" Before anyone can say anything, be sure to cut in: "You know, you sure feel that way. It's called *déjà vu*, that feeling like you've experienced something before."

Run the entire session exactly the same way you did last time. If the players respond differently, that's fine, make sure you run it as close as possible. We all know how obnoxious players can be, and if they begin to diverge too far off the track, start making secret die rolls. If you want to "play fair," you can let them make some kind of resistance roll or willpower check, etc. to keep it up, but if you want to have some real fun, try this out...

- Take some random dice and roll them. Look over them carefully, pick up the character sheets one by one, scrutinize them carefully, then look them dead in the eyes and say, "But you have this strange feeling that you really should be doing this," and repeat to them they way they acted last time.

- Or, if you're feeling really mean, take some dice that don't belong in the game (like 6-siders in the *Storyteller System*, or d10's in GURPS), roll those and follow the above instructions.

This little technique will accomplish three

things: 1) it will get the players confused and off balance; 2) it will give the players a sense that circumstances are way beyond their control; and 3) it will let them know that something in their lives has gone dreadfully wrong.

To add to their slowly growing paranoia, all through the session, place people standing on street corners, hiding in the shadows and peering over newspapers. Make these folks stand out. Dress them in black with black shades and black hats, driving long black Lincolns. Whenever one of your players tries to confront one of these folks, make sure they have an escape route. Either they just disappear into a crowd or around a blind corner or into a Lincoln, or some other mysterious way. Of course, dropping them down manhole covers could lead to some interesting chase scenes.

By the time you're wrapping things up for the evening, your players will be obviously frustrated (and rightly so!). You should give them a carrot to keep their interest up, so give them one. Give them one of the Watchers.

They'll use some kind of clever PC tactic that you haven't counted on (they always do), and you'll be caught with letting them catch a Watcher. That's cool, it's always good to reward the players when they out-think you. It also gives them a false sense of security, lulling them into the false belief that you don't have complete control over their fates.

Once they've gotten hold of him, he'll start to panic. He'll scream, "Wait! Wait! Abort! Abort!" That's when everything will start to melt around them. Buildings will look like candles in a microwave. The people around them will fall apart into squirming globules. Then, everything will go black, and you'll say, "That's it for this week. See you again next time."

## What's Really Going On

The characters are in big trouble.

At the end of the very first session, just when things were getting interesting, some Heavy Powerful Fellas got very interested in their activities. The characters have found out a little bit too much, and the Heavies decided to bring them to an underground facility, hooked up to a virtual reality program to find out just how much they know. For the last two sessions, the PCs have been locked up in cold storage, running through a VR program under the streets of Al Amarja.

There is a second reason the party's been hooked up to the chambers (and not just tortured to death). Their captors have found the characters to have great potential. If they can break the characters' minds, the party could make very valuable allies indeed. These are the reasons for the VR lightshow, and if the party can't figure a way out, they'll be nothing more than



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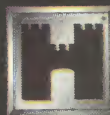
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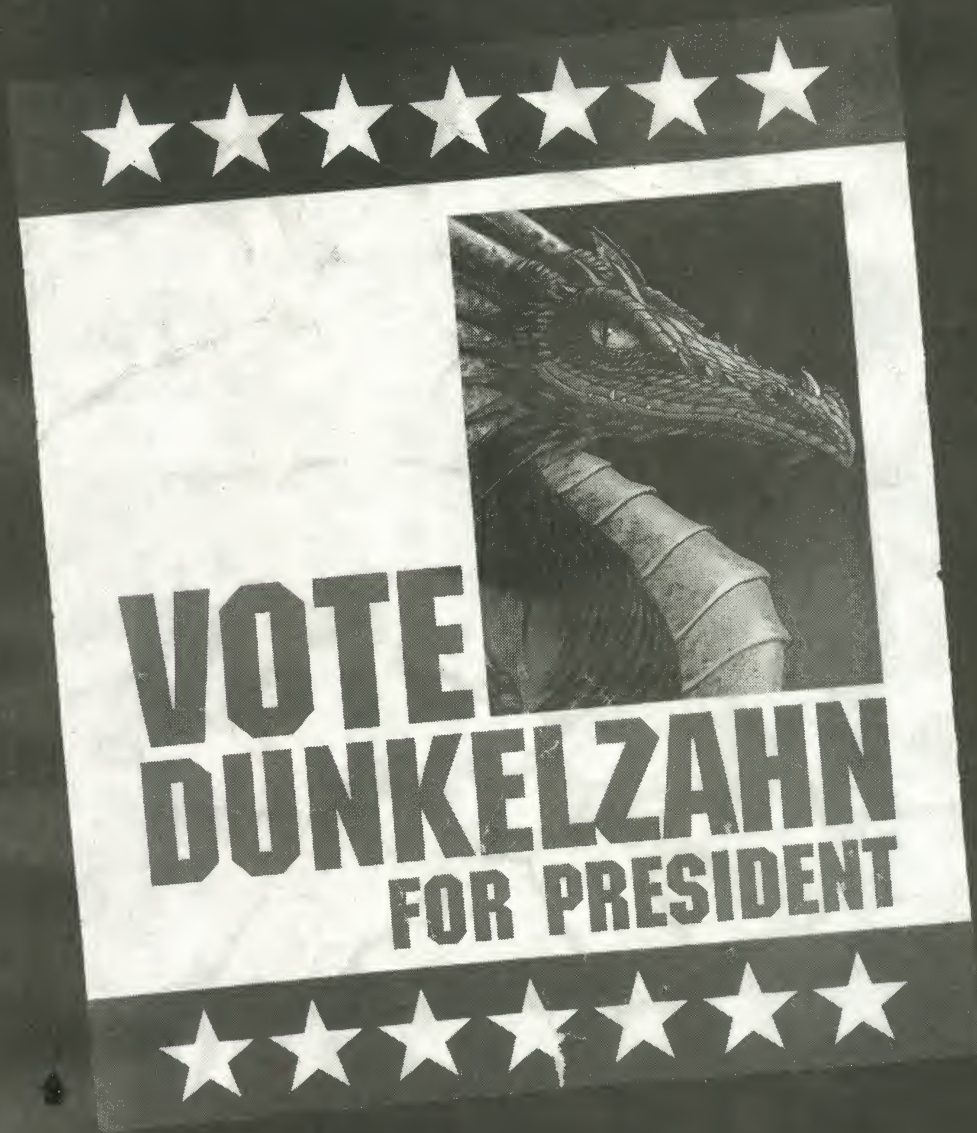
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## The Middle

When the next session rolls around, go through the same motions as before. The characters will experience the last session again, but this time, everything has a very surreal feel to it. The Watchers make more appearances, and this time, they'll be ready for the characters. Every time they try to approach the Watchers, the men in black will disappear in even more mysterious and disturbing ways: Melt them down like last time, or explode them into blue flame. Have them sink into the ground or have a nasty Cthulhu-like beastie rip out of the fabric of space and time to take them away. It's all up to you.

Remember to keep reminding your players that



this feeling of *déjà vu* just won't leave them alone, but they are just dead wrong about it. This has never happened before and you don't have any idea what they are talking about. Making obvious contradictions like this right in the player's faces is going to get them perturbed. Good. The angrier they get, the more the computer that's running the VR lightshow screws up. But if they get real belligerent about it, get belligerent back. Throw dice at them (make sure you miss, by the way), shout at them and tell them to "SHUT UP!" Or, take a more subtle approach by requiring them to make rolls for everything they do. Have them make Dex/Reflex rolls to pick up a cup of coffee or turn the key in the ignition of their car. Keep this up until they drop this ridiculous notion that they've done all of this before. If they try to throw themselves off of buildings or anything else suicidal, tell them "You know, this may only be a hunch, but something like that may be rather —

terminal."

By the way, it is rather terminal.

The computer running the simulation will overload if one of them tries something "terminal." It will cause massive feedback in the computer's circuitry, causing a crash. The entire system will overload. All the other characters will go black and you take the character that did the dirty deed out of the room. Tell them they wake up in a VR suit, tied down and very, very hungry. There's an IV up the character's nose that goes all the way down the throat and into the stomach. Let them deal with that for a while. Then, once they've gotten themselves free, go through the following description for your little martyr.

## Good, Clean Fun

If you want some real paranoia, try this out. The other PCs don't know what happened to the awakened PC during their blackout. When he returns, begin the day all over again. The awakened PC knows that his memory is supposed to be erased, but something's gone wrong and he has his full memory of his time in the laboratory. Now watch him as he tries to convince the other PCs that throwing themselves off of buildings or in front of trucks will "free" them from their trap. Just good clean fun!

## The Staroscik Maneuver

This is an alternate means of escape for your PCs that Matt Staroscik used in one of the playtest sessions. When the guards came rushing through the door, demanding the PCs get down on the floor, Matt just stood there with a smile on his face saying, "You're not going to hurt us. If you do, you'll have to answer to the guys who have been keeping us alive for months. Why don't you hand your gun over to me?" They still had to engage in some HTH with the guards, but it was a brilliant move and worth mentioning as an alternative. Those damn clever players!

## The Laboratory

It's your typical super-sterile, super advanced laboratory. The other characters are locked away on their own tables with their own IV's and VR suits. There's a door to the south, but it's got an electric lock that will not give. Tubes and wires line the walls, giving the lab a kind of archaic or alchemical feel. Everything is beeping and bleeping and the character won't understand any of it.

It'll be at this point that the door will buzz and a thin, scrawny doctor will wander in with a Coke and a clipboard. When the character attacks poor Dr. Charles Westmoreland, the doctor will be terrified, taken completely off guard. He'll do anything the character wants him to do. You see, he's fully aware of how dangerous the characters



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are. After all, why else would they be locked away here? He's fully ready to cooperate in any way he can.

Westmoreland knows how to wake up the other characters (they're on "pause" at the moment) and he'll begin to do so as soon as the freed character demands that he do it. However, once he does so, he'll notice that the silent alarm has been switched and he'll start to stall. Westmoreland is no actor, however, and a good Perception Roll of some kind will alert the character to his activities. If the character doesn't catch the hint, have security show up, lock him up again and erase his memory of the event. He gets to start all over again. But if the character is smart enough to pick up the hint, he can have Westmoreland lock the door again and get at least two more of the characters out of their predicament. Your characters will come up with some really clever ways to keep the door locked. Let them. They'll be suffering from starvation, stumbling around and dry-heaving for a while. After all, they've been locked up for five months. That's right, five months. It's taken them that long to break out of the computer's spell. If the characters whine, have Westmoreland tell them that they've got people in the 'freezers down the hall that have been there for years. Let 'em chew on that for a while.

Once the characters get all their compatriots out of lock-up, the security will be working at a way to burn through the lock. The only way out is through a tiny airduct in the ceiling. There's plenty of stuff around the room to stack to build a make-shift ladder, and once they're there, they'll have to shove each other into the hole. Of course, just when the last character is ready to jump up, Westmoreland will bolt for the door and let the security guys in. Just as they grab for his leg, the other characters will be able to pull him up. He'll be kicking and screaming, his legs pulled down by hefty security guys, and just as he's yanked up, they'll all have to dodge bullets as the guards fire up into the airduct. Pretty breathtaking, eh?

The characters race through a maze of ducts, stumbling across a small room with doctors' overcoats. This is their only chance to get some clothes. The airducts eventually lead out to an iron staircase leading straight up. From there, they find a stone stairway and the distant sound of rushing water. The walls are sweating and the droplets have a salty taste.

## Ending (and Beginning Again)

When the characters escape the underground, they will come up into the desolate sewer system of Al Amarja. No doubt, they will have no idea where they are or how they got there. They have no identification, no passports, no visas, nothing. They're going to have to go through illegal means

to get some, and of course, that means going through the black market of Al Amarja's capital city, The Edge.

The "barrio" that they've risen up to is the Great Men Barrio. Here, statues of men from history stand in the midst of graffiti and filth. This is one of the more dangerous parts of town; it makes Harlem look like Rivendell. The first things they see are a gated warehouse (the home of Sir Arthur Compton), the Winds of Change Casino, and the D'Aubainne Museum of Modern Life. The cannot enter Compton's home, no matter how clever they think they are. The security at the D'Aubainne Museum isn't about to let a bunch of freaks who smell like the sewers in. It looks as if the only place to find shelter is in Chik's casino...

When they step inside, the characters will be surrounded by sensations. The lights are low, the air is thick with the smell of cigars, cigarettes, marijuana and incense, and there is the sound of money jingling and jangling just under the ruckus of wild men making wild wagers. It looks like a scene right out of an *Indiana Jones* film with livestock at their feet and low lamps hanging from the low ceiling just before their eyes. There are dense shadows to hide in, and couples are making good use of the space.

In the midst of it, surrounded by beautiful men both young and old, is Chikutorpl ("Chik" to her friends). She is majestic. Dark eyes peek out from behind a white feathered mask, and her lips are red and plush. There is enough jewelry about her neck, bare ankles and fingers to buy the characters a dozen fake ID's — a dozen for each major country in the world, that is.

She immediately notices them and moves through her crowd of worshipers right to them. Her voice is... somehow not human. She speak with an accent that no one will recognize, and invites the characters to sit down, have a drink on the casino and enjoy themselves. She's a sucker for a good story and she wants to hear theirs. Whether they lie or tell the truth, she'll laugh all the way through, especially at the painful parts. Then, she will call for refills on their drinks and invite them to the back of the bar.

The characters are in for a real surprise. Chik's casino is a rather strange place that ignores many of the laws of our reality. If you can fill the place with strange, non-Euclidean angles that defy our understanding of modern architecture and physics, you'll be doing just fine. When they reach the back of the place, they'll be surrounded by a sordid crew of criminals and desperate men, for Chik's casino is the last place you go when you have nowhere else to run. These folks are making wagers with the only thing they have left.

Mr. Joel Blankenship is wagering his sight to have a chance to break his writer's block. Many years ago, he wrote a beautiful novel, and has not been able to write a single word since. What the

## You Bet Your Life

Remember when I mentioned that I playtested this story with the players running themselves? Well, when we came to this part of the story, I handed them the two dice and had them wagering some pretty precious things. I do not use dice when I GM, and now I was letting them wager everything on a roll of the dice. Needless to say, those dice were like hot potatoes, and they were very reluctant to roll them. Try it out with your own group and see what happens.



## Films to Watch

For more inspiration, check out *North By Northwest* and *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (two great Hitchcock classics), *Frantic* (with Harrison Ford), *Blow Out* (with John Travolta), and *The Usual Suspects* (now out on video). All of these are great examples of how to pull normal folks into mind-blowing conspiracies.

PC's will see is his failure to toss a quarter "heads up" three times in a row. As the third coin falls down tails, his face twists into a mask of terror and his eyes explode into green fire. Chick giggles and turns on her naked heel to the characters, her smile full of sabers. "So," she asks, "what do you want to wager?"

Now's their chance. She's willing to let them wager something very dear to discover their forgotten past. Or to get a whole ton of money. It's up to them. There's only one catch. They can only wager for themselves. Sorry, but you can't be put in charge of someone else's destiny. Also, they can't change anything that's already happened. We're dealing with destiny here, not with the past. When they tell her what they want, Chick will look at each of them individually and tell them what they have to put up in exchange. She will know precise details of their backgrounds, dreams and fears. Then, she will turn to a craps table and take two dice into her hand. "Roll these," she says. "Roll a seven and we'll see what I can do." When Chick announces this, pull out two d6's and play with them between your fingers. (See sidebar.)

If they really want to chance it, let them. It'll just give them something else to do while they're

them and find someone else to play with.

## Afterward


Well, you've got them in Al Amarja. Now it's up to you to keep them there. The Customs and Immigration department will be very interested in how they got to the island without the proper papers, and the Peace Force will be looking out for anyone fitting their description. Why? Because it's more fun that way.

I designed this trick to work with *Over The Edge*, but it can be used to bring your players into just about any game system from any game system. Try bringing fantasy characters into *Vampire* or *Shadowrun* characters into *Doomtrooper*. After all, it's not the system that matters, it's the setting, and the characters that enter into it.

Once again, I hope this little strategy inspires some wicked thoughts in your brain. One of the dangerous traps to fall into when you're a GM is player complacency. It's all too easy for your players to get to know you and your style. But, if you take away everything they rely on — even the world under their feet — then they really have to



in *The Edge*. If not, remind them that they'll be turning down the opportunity of a lifetime. If they still refuse, Chick will sigh and become bored with

improvise, and that's when players are truly at their best. 



# Courting the Orient

**A**lthough a lot of gaming systems have Oriental adventure supplements, few adventures are based around them. It's not the lack of material, monsters, or myth, though. The problem is cultural. In your traditional euro-centric campaign world, it is possible to have an adventure where the characters just run around slaying things — a good ol' fashioned hack and slash adventure! A Chinese or Japanese based world, however, is too structured for such things. Characters require papers, authorization, and a proper destination. You can't simply wander around Medieval China. (Actually, you can't simply wander around Medieval Europe, either, but Europeans have rowdier fairy tales. As I said, it's a culture thing.)

This is not to say that there are no unauthorized travelers — there are. But these "travelers" are vagabonds, vagrants, beggars and bandits, not adventurers. What the Oriental setting needs is a mechanism to form adventuring parties *within* the confines of the government; parties allowed to go out and fight monsters, bandits, and invaders, yet also able to remain a part of the bureaucracy. Fortunately, there is just such a mechanism — an official known as the district magistrate. By becoming his lieutenants, the characters acquire official sanction for their adventures.

## ***Credit where credit is due***

Much of the following information comes from the 17 novels and short story collections by Robert Van Gulik, who during the 40s and 50s translated and adapted many old Chinese detective stories for western readers. These stories are about the life and adventures of Magistrate Dee, and are set within the T'ang Dynasty, in the second half of the 7th century. (For those who care about such things, during the 7th century the Vikings were out burning monasteries. It was 100 years after King Arthur, 200 years before Charlemagne.) I urge anyone wanting to run an

Oriental adventure based on these ideas to read these stories. (I also urge anyone *not* wanting to run an Oriental adventure to read these books. Not only do they give the referee a feel for the period, the culture, and the setting, but they're darn good mysteries, too.)

## ***The Magistrate***

To understand the employee, you must understand the employer, so we'll start with a brief look at the magistrate. In China, any person who passes their second literary examination — young or old, rich or poor, noble or common — receives an appointment within the Administration. A successful candidate might become a court poet, or even a historian, but 90% of the time he becomes a district magistrate. The district magistrate is the lowest ranking official in the bureaucracy. He is judge, tax collector, administrator, registrar, and sheriff, too! (Sort of a Sherlock Holmes, Perry Mason, and Winston Churchill rolled into one.)

His powers are awesome. From his headquarters in a city's Tribunal, he has virtually absolute power over a district consisting of the city and the sixty or so mile radius of countryside around it. He can arrest anybody, subpoena any sort of evidence needed, and even resort to giving unresponsive witnesses and suspects the third degree. The people may rise up against him if he becomes too harsh, irreverent, or incompetent, in order to attract official attention from outside; his staff will turn against him if he is corrupt, inefficient, or breaks too many rules, to keep from being executed with him; his conduct is always subject to review by higher authority, who employ spies, informants, and roving censors to keep an eye on him — but so long as he keeps order, he can get away with a lot (and so can those who work for him)!

His usual term of office is three years, after which he is either moved to a new district or pro-

by  
**James R.  
Collier**  
Illustrated  
by  
**Bob Hobbs**



"By becoming [the district magistrate's] lieutenants,..."

NOTE: The books also use the terms bailiff and assistant. I didn't get any help from the actual Chinese writing — to me, the symbols look like caricatures of the Three Stooges. Use whichever term you like.

moted. This is to prevent him from conspiring with the locals and setting up his own little kingdom. During those three years, the magistrate is responsible for just about everything that happens. He and his staff must prosecute criminals, deal with bands of robbers, hunt down dangerous animals, and settle disputes. (Do any of these jobs sound familiar?)

### Mayor - and Priest, too?

The classic Chinese detective story is rife with supernatural elements, such as ghosts pleading their cases in court, inanimate objects called as witnesses and made to speak, and visits to the Chinese Netherworld to consult with the Judge of the Dead. Since Oriental game settings are also rife with supernatural elements, it seems to me that a magistrate should have clerical abilities. Since a magistrate can come from any walk of life, not just the priesthood, it would be better if he had access to magical items, rather than making him a cleric. One or two items, ones that would allow him to speak with the dead, get information from inanimate objects, and commune with higher powers should suffice, and I have included a description of just such a set of items at the end of the article. (The magistrate does not need the ability to enter another plane. In the stories, a magistrate requests and receives an audience with the Black Judge. I judge this to mean that the magistrate communicates with the divine being, who then transports the magistrate into his divine presence. Consider it a special ability of the Black Judge, granted by the Celestial Bureaucracy, and usable only on magistrates.)

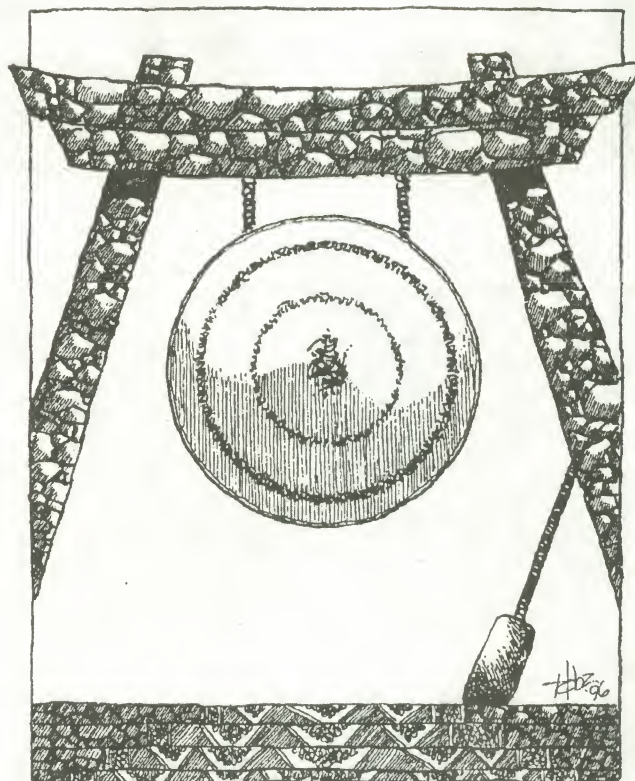
Of course, psionic powers would also do the job, and the referee could rule that the magistrate has psionics (him being a non-player character and all). However, we have just discussed the difficulty of making the magistrates into priests. You could hardly turn around and make the entire Imperial bureaucracy psionic! Far, far easier to hand out a few magic rings, or (better yet) magical seals of office (see notes).

### The Tribunal

As the headquarters and home base of the mag-

istrate, and therefore of the characters, this complex of buildings will play a major role in the character's lives, so here is a short description (see diagram).

Surrounded by solid walls, the tribunal is a miniature fortress. A large sign at the main gate identifies it to all the people. Inside the walls are a number of single story buildings, separated by



courtyards. The guard's quarters flank the main gate. In the first courtyard can be found the jail cells for men and women and, at the rear, the court hall. A gong stands beside the front doors, and any citizen can ring this gong, thus summoning the court, to report a crime or make a complaint. The sound of this gong will be the starting point of many adventures.

The second courtyard contains offices for the scribes and archivists. The third courtyard is ornamental, used for entertaining important visitors and for a few public functions. The fourth courtyard is for the magistrate's family, and would not be entered by anyone else.

The magistrate's office is in the rear of the court hall itself. The court hall is a large, imposing room. Seating along the walls is ample, because any and all citizens are permitted to attend the daily sessions.



At the far end is the bench. Set on a dais one foot off the ground, the bench is a table covered with a scarlet cloth. On it is set a gavel — two blocks of wood, used much the same way as today's hammer and anvil design; a writing kit consisting of a set of brushes, an inkstone with blocks of red and black ink, and the seals of office; a vase filled with bamboo strips, and usually a couple of scrolls. There is an armchair for the judge, and behind him is a curtain which covers the door leading back into the private offices. This curtain has a unicorn, the symbol of perception, embroidered on it.

Additional buildings should be added to a fantasy world tribunal, such as special cells for magical creatures, storerooms for scrolls and magical items, and rooms to store dead monsters whose corpses have magical (and therefore monetary) value.

### *The staff of the tribunal*

The tribunal is mostly self-contained. There are no lawyers or private eyes involved, nor does the army interfere (unless requested - or sent!). The magistrate handles most of the investigating himself, making him that most precious of things — an overworked bureaucrat. Fortunately for him, he has a lot of help. In performing all these tasks, the magistrate has two (very different) groups of assistants.

The first group consisted of the permanent personnel of the district tribunal: the block and village wardens, the constables, scribes, clerks, and junior bureaucrats of the town. These people are all residents of the district, attached to the Tribunal, and work with whatever magistrate is posted there. There are also a few specialists brought in when required - the coroner, for one. Our FRPG court will add a few specialists to the roster, such as *shukenja* and *wu-jen*. This first group of assistants will handle all the routine work — patrolling the streets, recording births and deaths, collecting tax money, and so forth. In the game, these people are important non-player characters: people that the characters will interact with a lot more often than innkeepers and blacksmiths. The constables in particular will fill the ranks of henchmen when the time comes.

The second group consists of the magistrate's lieutenants, a team of toughs and experts which the magistrate recruits early in his career. Since they travel with the magistrate, they have no local biases or connections to influence them, and he can trust them with important tasks — a thing he could never do with members of the tribunal. These lieutenants are jobs made to order for characters.

### *A session in the Tribunal*

There are three regularly scheduled sessions of the tribunal per day, set at dawn, noon, and in the afternoon. The gong is sounded, the doors

opened, and the audience enters. The sessions are always open to the public. Most of these sessions have to do with mundane matters, such as taxes to be collected, new laws, additional tariffs, and license renewals. Additional court sessions are called whenever a crime is reported or discovered. When court is in session, the lieutenants stand to the magistrate's left. The senior scribe stands to the right, and the constables line up before the bench on either side, armed with bamboo poles and various instruments of torture designed to "impress" the defendants. Anyone who comes to court is made to kneel before the bench, unless the magistrate specifically allows otherwise. The witnesses and defendants are summoned by the magistrate, who writes the person's name on a slip of paper and gives it to the head constable. Questioning is always done in the hall, and always in public.

Although open to the public, rowdiness is not tolerated. The magistrate will gavel for silence. If he cannot be heard, runners with signs reading "Silence!" will run up and down the hall. If that doesn't work, the constables throw everybody out. In a fantasy world, a spell of silence is another option — as is a fireball, I suppose.

### *The Magistrate's role in the game*

The magistrate character should be used by referees as a focus to the character's activities. He will assign them their tasks, provide them with information, resources, and authority, and punish their improprieties. The magistrate is the referee's tool. He can be used to start adventures, and to provide necessary tools and magic; to see the clues that the players missed and to make sure the adventure proceeds correctly; to reward the characters afterwards and to wrap up any loose ends, and even to turn up with a rescue party when all seems lost.

### *The Lieutenant*

A magistrate may have from 1 to 6 lieutenants, taken from any class. In the Magistrate Dee novels, Dee has four lieutenants. There is Hoong, his old retainer, a sage now growing old. He knew Dee as a boy, and now serves as councilor. Many magistrates have at least one councilor, and in a fantasy campaign a magical aide would be indispensable. His second lieutenant, Ma Joong, is an ex-soldier turned highwayman, who left the army because he beat up with a corrupt officer. His friend and fellow lieutenant Chiao Tai was an officer, who nearly died because of an incompetent general. When the government would not punish the general, he resigned and became a highwayman in order to track the general down. Both he and Ma Joong are expert martial artists, bowmen, and sword fighters. The final lieutenant, Tao Gan, was a former con artist and master of disguise whom Dee reformed. He knows all the tricks of

*"90% of the time he becomes a district magistrate."*

NOTE: Unfortunately, women's lib had not caught on in the T'ang dynasty. Bureaucrats, including the magistrate, were male. Naturally, things are different in your campaign.



finding traps, secret doors, and hidden safes. I would think that a mage, two fighters and a thief would make a fairly balanced party, wouldn't you?

As a magistrate's enforcers, it would be the character's job to deal with threats to the district, whether it be from a rogue magician, supernatural monster, or band of ruffians, so their group should include both fighters and mages. On the other hand, they would also have to be the magistrate's eyes and ears on criminal cases, so the party would also have to have thieving skills.

A character with the post of lieutenant will have certain powers due to his job. He can command block wardens and constables, getting them to do things like kick down doors, hold onto captured felons while the character searches their house, cart, or belongings; he can ask the scribes and archivists to write up letters of introduction and look up information from the tribunal records; he can make arrests, confiscate goods, and even enter private homes (though he'd better have a pretty good reason)!

### *Adventures galore*

The lieutenant's job is so broad that any kind of adventure, or adventurer, can be altered to fit with just a little coaxing. Here are a few examples from the Magistrate Dee novels:

- ❖ The lieutenants are assigned to hunt down a weretiger, believed to be killing prominent citizens. They must track it down, discover who it is, and either slay or capture it.

- ❖ In order to locate a suspect in a brutal slaying, one or more of the lieutenants must infiltrate the thieves or beggar's guilds, gain their trust, and find out where their man is hiding.

- ❖ The magistrate orders them out on a routine check to uncover any corrupt wardens and constables. The method is up to them, but no one must be hurt, no one must suspect, and guilty parties must not escape.

- ❖ Outlaws have moved into the area. The lieutenants have been ordered to track them down.

Chinese detective stories often feature supernatural elements as well, as mentioned above. Further adventures could have the lieutenants searching a private home, abandoned ruin, or public building to find an inanimate witness, or having one lieutenant sitting in a graveyard taking down a dead witness's statement while the other lieutenants try to prevent the graveyard's other inhabitants from eating them. Plus there's the usual adventures. The Tribunal is required to have a map of every building, tunnel, and ruin in the district. The discovery of a hidden dungeon or tunnel complex would require the magistrate to send a mapping expedition, required to note any major treasures and resources, and to deal with any public menaces found there. Guess who he'll send?

### *A sample adventure*

Here's how an average game might go. Bright and early, the tribunal opens for the morning session. The magistrate and his lieutenants are being thoroughly bored by a report on harvests when suddenly Old Mr. Wang, the goldsmith, races in. His shop has been burglarized, and an antique statue recently uncovered by a mute traveling vagabond has been stolen. The magistrate orders the tribunal cleared, as he and the lieutenants prepare to inspect the scene.

At the shop, the particulars come out. The figurine was that of a six-armed woman, in the style of the southern barbarians. The vagabond, Hwa Mao, claimed in sign language that he had found it in a haunted field, where he had slept to win a bet. Made of gilded bronze, the figure had rubies for eyes, each one worth five gold bars. Naturally, Wang had not told the ruffian that. He had bargained the man down to five copper coins (from ten).

Only four others knew that the statue was in the shop. Wang had consulted the jeweler Lin Kai about removing the stones. The retired Imperial Councilor Han Ta-Ma was a collector of antiquities, and had come with his eldest son Han Ming to examine the object. Wang's assistant, Meng Lan, was the only other person who had a key to the strongbox where the statue had been stored. Meng was now missing.

Wang also mentions that Han Ming had reacted strangely to the statue. He had become agitated, licking his lips repeatedly, and had obviously wanted the statue badly.

After getting a sketch of the statue, the magistrate sends our heroes out looking for Meng Lan and Hwa Mao, while he himself speaks to Councilor Han and Jeweler Lin. After a few turns, the party finds Meng — dead. His face is frozen in an expression of indescribable horror, but there's not a mark on his body.

Back at the tribunal, the magistrate summons Meng's spirit to testify as to how he died. Meng's ghost is incoherent and gives little help, other than the fact that he was "strangled by six hands!" The magistrate decides that the statue must be cursed.

Next, he summons Hwa Mao's spirit to tell about how he died, but the spirit does not appear. Apparently Mr. Hwa is still alive, but for how long? The magistrate sends his lieutenants out into the night.

After a fruitless search, they meet the magistrate in a nearby restaurant for breakfast. He informs them that Lin the jeweler is still alive. Lin says he knows nothing about the statue, except that the rubies are real. The magistrate tells them to search harder, and leaves. After the lieutenants dice to see who pays for the meal (a common custom, incidentally), a beggar sidles up to them. He

"This curtain has a unicorn... embroidered on it."

NOTE: Van Gulik says unicorn in the books, but the illustrations he provides look more like a ki-rin. I don't see that it matters either way, unless you plan to create a magical curtain.



claims that for a little money, he will tell them where to find Hwa Mao. Threatening him with the tribunal, they get the beggar to lead them to The Phoenix Inn, a shack in the bad part of town. Hwa Mao has been staying there along with various other lowlife. The moment the lieutenants enter, Hwa Mao waves wildly at them, signing that they are lieutenants, and rouses the lowlife to attack. A general melee ensues, in which the lieutenants must take Hwa Mao alive, and capture as many of the lowlives as they can, dead or alive. If Hwa Mao escapes, the block warden grabs him in the street (the brawl attracted his attention).

In the tribunal, Hwa Mao gives his mute testimony. He had slept in a cursed battlefield in order to win a bet with his gang boss. He found the statue there. The boss had grabbed it. Three nights later the boss was dead — strangled. Everyone thought it had been treachery — somebody trying to take over the gang and make off with the stat-

ue. The second in command was hard pressed to keep control, but he did, for three nights. Then he died. Three nights after that, Wen, a third gang member, died, demolishing their theory of treachery. Although he'd been the best thief left in their band, Wen had not taken control of the gang, pre-

ferred to rob rather than run things. It looked as though a curse had come upon them, and the only new thing in their lives was the statue. That's why the gang had abandoned him in the night, leaving him the statue. Terrified, Hwa Mao had attempted to sell it at his earliest opportunity. Wang had taken it off his hands a day before it was due to kill again.

(Bonus points if any of the characters come up with the questions "How long ago did the gang leave Mao alone with the statue?" or "What do we know about Meng's background?". By now they should be thinking along the lines of a monster killing off those who touch the statue, in order of level.)

The magistrate calls in Han, Lin, and Wang, and explains the situation. Wang is terrified, and demands protection. Han is unconcerned, saying that he has a special charm of protection. Lin is also unworried, but doesn't say why. A letter from



the temple indicates that no evil emanations have been found within the city.

The lieutenants meet for lunch and discussion. Is the statue really cursed? Is Councilor Han really protected from harm? The wrongful arrest or death of an Imperial Councilor would ruin all



their careers, but so would allowing him to die at the hands of a demon. In addition, Han seems unconcerned about his son, who might have touched the object. Why? Jeweler Lin too, is unconcerned. What is Lin hiding? Could he be a magician in disguise, or have magical defenses?

As it turns out, Jeweler Lin is a mage. He knows the item is non-magical, and believes that he can handle a mundane threat. Councilor Han has been expecting a visitor. He had left Imperial service when it was discovered his son was mixed up with an evil cult, in order to 'deprogram' him. The statue is a death warrant from the cult, sent to them with Wang's unknowing help.

Hwa Mao is a liar and an assassin. His whole story is a lie. He is out to kill Han and his son, and make it look like a curse got them.

There are several ways to uncover all this, with the magistrate's help. A further search of Mao's things will reveal the potion he used to overcome the power of the magistrate's truth spell (his muteness is a ruse, used to mask the fact that his voice would not be heard while the potion was in use), and the device he used to strangle Meng. A trip to the capital to look up old records would uncover Councilor Han's story. A few detection spells may discover Han's and Lin's defenses. Should the characters not turn up the truth, the magistrate will eventually solve the case, sending the lieutenants to deal with the criminal Mao and any cohorts, supernatural or otherwise, and bring them in for the final judgment.

The lieutenants relax afterwards in their favorite inn, spending their well-earned salary on pots of wine and boiled crab, and discussing the fine points of the case. Suddenly, a cry is heard from the kitchen....

### Further adventures

The magistrate moves once every three to four years to a new district, taking his lieutenants with him, so you don't have to worry about "milking" an area dry. Have the players kill off all the monsters, then announce that the magistrate's assignment is up, and that you are moving on. You can also change the type of game by reassigning him. Don't like hack-and-slash any more? Move them all closer to the capital, and indulge in a little court intrigue. Tired of intrigue? Move them to a border district and fight monsters. Each move should increase the magistrate's level, so that he can keep up with his entourage.

Eventually the magistrate is promoted to a

higher rank — first to prefect, in charge of several districts, then to a higher post such as provincial governor (runs an entire province), imperial censor (inspects trouble spots), or courtier. By choosing the promotion that best suits the way you play, you can run high level adventures in the field, in the palace, or both.

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van Gulik, Robert. *The Chinese Lake Murders*. London: Harper and Row, 1960.

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van Gulik, Robert. *The Chinese Maze Murders*. London: Harper and Row, 1952.

van Gulik, Robert. *The Chinese Nail Murders*. London: Harper and Row, 1961.

These five books, listed in internal chronological order, are the basic set of Judge Dee mysteries. They are an excellent look at life in the tribunal, and the mysteries contain enough details to run a hundred adventures.

Other interesting books in the series are:

van Gulik, Robert. *The Haunted Monastery*. London: Harper and Row, 1961. A look inside a Taoist temple, what goes on there, and what can be found within.

van Gulik, Robert. *The Red Pavilion*. London: Harper and Row, 1964. An old Chinese amusement resort is the setting for this murder mystery. The seamier side of China, if you will, and an excellent setting for adventure.

van Gulik, Robert. *Judge Dee At Work*. London: Harper and Row, 1967. Eight short stories with backgrounds ranging from military posts to a poor man's hovel. Good cross section of life.

Also recommended: *Five Deadly Venoms*, a B-grade chop-socky which has the single redeeming quality in that it was set in a tribunal, allowing the referee to see all my article's little details in action — in lots of action.

In addition, scenes in the Star Trek TNG pilot episode "Encounter at Farpoint" are set in a pseudo-Chinese law court. Ignore the big moving chair. ☸



"...The figure had rubies for eyes, each one worth five gold bars."

NOTE: China didn't use gold coins. They used paper money and gold bars for big transactions.



# The Big Event

**W**hen a role-playing campaign has gone on for a long time, the players and game master (GM) have often exhausted the possibilities of simple adventuring. The dungeon is old hat, all monsters (or aliens, or mutants) for miles around have been eradicated, and more appeals for quests by kings or mysterious strangers are getting a bit thin. The GM can supply a challenge by increasing the power of the opposition, but this can lead to an escalation that may border on the ridiculous as the party gains more power and gizmos. He can encourage the party to travel, conquer their own domain, or engage in politics, but some players are remarkably resistant to much of either. Something new and potent is needed when campaign gets a little tired. Like the introduction of THE BIG EVENT.

GMs may use random event charts or their own storylines in creating major happenings in their campaign. Yet often player-characters (PCs) give small attention to the greater things going on around them. The events are not really their problem. Their concerns are centered on more immediate considerations like getting money and experience. The GM is then placed in the awkward position of forcing something down the party's throat because they are uninterested in what's going on (GM: "The rumors of war none of you bothered to listen to turned out to be true. Looks like you're all going to be called up for the army again." Sounds of disgust are heard from the players).

Some players prefer their challenges to be simple, direct, and most importantly, to be resolved with a certain finality. Ongoing bickering with NPC's who can't be conquered, influenced, or bought may bring on the feeling that the GM is persecuting their characters. It becomes the party vs. everyone else.

Realistic? Maybe, but not very heroic. The

players have become bored with dealing the same people and problems. They need a big, different kind of challenge.

Rather than usual campaign occurrences like floods, fires, famines, peasant revolts, and plagues, THE BIG EVENT is a dominating circumstance that affects everyone and lasts quite a long time. It totally changes the nature of a campaign. When it's presented as an act of nature or society as a whole, there is less resentment and antagonism by players. Their NPC rivals are in the same boat and need help as much as anyone. The party will be so distracted by the new problems that their old concerns will disappear. It's a way of getting all the PC's involved, too.

Not only is THE BIG EVENT a significant change. It will be a memorable occurrence, that the players will long talk about. It's a long-term backdrop that sets the mood for a revitalized campaign. Sometimes it can lead to new adventures, other times it must just be endured. It is also a way on ending a campaign with a bang instead of a whimper. Don't worry about overdoing it. It's supposed to be radically different from what's gone on before.

The following is a list of twenty rather drastic themes that can be used by a GM to revitalize a stagnant campaign and get the players involved in something new. Although they are designed for a fantasy games, they can be modified to fit other genres.

**1. Ominous Omens and Fantastic Phenomena:** It starts with unusual atmospheric conditions causing fear, death, and destruction, including sinister auroras (lower NPC morale at night), violent meteor showers (2% chance to encounter, minor to heavy damage; occasionally a building is destroyed), balls of fire (4% chance, minor to moderate damage), dry ice hail (3%

**Shaking up a  
bogged-down RPG  
campaign**

**by Larry  
Granato**



chance for an light to moderate damage), foul winds (5% chance for a minor damage), deadly rays (1% chance of encounter, critical damage), poisonous vapors (1% chance of heavy damage), acid rain (3% chance, moderate damage) a green moon (lower all luck or saving throws by 25%), and the sky going dark during the day (panic and fear among NPCs). This is followed by a massive assault of vermin (rats, snakes, toads, birds, insects, etc.) which horrifies the populace. The creatures ravage food supplies and spread disease creating a famine and plague. Communications, travel, and trade come to a halt as everyone except the boldest or most foolish huddles indoors. These conditions persist for 2-8 months. Whether they are a precursor to something worse (like #3 or #6) or just some quirk of the cosmos is up to the GM.

**2. Phantasmagoria:** The dead arise! Ghosts, hauntings, and psychic phenomena massively increase in number (double, triple, or quadruple these types of encounters). Vampires stalk the land. Infestations of undead are common. Tombs, barrows, old battlefields, and graveyards teem with monsters (automatic multiple encounters). Anyone who dies is 90% likely to "come back" as some undead. Spells, magic items, and turnings affecting or protecting against the dead are reduced in effectiveness at least 50%-75%. Isolated villages may be completely overrun. The wave of horror lasts 6-30 months.

**3. The Danse Macabre:** A massive wave of morbidity engulfs the world. Deaths due to disease, accidents, violence, and inexplicable causes greatly increase. Fully 50% of "raise-dead"-type spells will fail to function, and anyone casting such a spell is likely to die on the spot. Other curative magics are likewise reduced in effectiveness. Funerals, mourners, and corpses become a common sight. The land seems empty; villages and castles lie deserted and abandoned. Survivors become obsessed with death. Made your will yet? The situation lasts up to 1-10 years.

**4. Economic Collapse:** The worst financial crisis in history. All money in banks and investments are lost. Nations are bankrupted. Most businesses go under (including the local magic shop and jeweler). Property has only a tiny fraction of its former value. There's no market for any services or treasure the party may have. Prices skyrocket and

inflation is at ten thousand percent. There's nothing like the PCs having to cart around bushels of money to buy a loaf of bread. Up to 1-10 years are needed for recovery. This is a good way to restrain PCs who have too much cash.

**5. Superstition Mania:** The populace is obsessed with mystic revelations and taboos. Fortune-tellers, seers, mediums, diviners, astrologers, soothsayers, oracles, charlatans, and quacks become omnipresent. No person will begin the smallest activity without making an occult consultation. People look for hidden meanings in



every occurrence in their lives. (Broke your boot-lace? Better not do any traveling today!) Every PC should have lucky and unlucky days, numbers, planets, colors, items, etc., assigned by the GM. PCs who scoff at superstition will be considered pariahs and jinxes by the population, and should have continuing "bad luck" arranged by the GM (their "bad luck" might rub off on other PCs, too). The mania persists for 1-8 years.

**6. Millenarianism:** The end of the world is near! Strange portents and predictions of impending ruin cause large numbers of people to quit their jobs, sell their possessions, and pack the churches and temples. Many become highly para-



noid, and will arm and barricade themselves in strongholds and hideaways. Doomslayers abound and mobs everywhere will wail and publicly chastise themselves for their sins. PCs who don't join in repenting will be considered agents of evil by the mob, and subjected to the utmost hostility. The frenzy will increase until the date set for the "end" (12-48 months) after which conditions will quickly return to normal.

**7. Decadence and Moral Decay:** A major decline in morals gives rise to degeneracy and degradation. Alcohol and drug abuse are rampant. Few bother to work, but instead spend their time in licentious revels. The weak are vilely exploited by the powerful. Government becomes totally corrupt. Violence and crimes of unspeakable horror are commonplace. Evil is actively embraced. Persons of virtue are scorned, and do-gooders are put to an agonizing death for the public's enjoyment. This continues for 2-20 years. The party may covertly lead the resistance to the evil around them, while carefully hiding their identities.

**8. Persecution and Witch Hunts:** The public is filled with irrational hatred towards some real or imagined enemy (often mages, but possibly minorities like elves, followers of a particular religion, foreigners, etc.). There are constant rumors of plots and conspiracies. Anyone falling under suspicion will be hunted down and arrested. Prisoners are forced to testify against themselves and their friends. They will probably be tortured, and allowed no defense at their trials. Almost all will be found guilty and executed. The persecution lasts 12-36 months (60%) or 3-6 years (40%). Characters are likely to be involved either as suspects or unwilling accomplices in the persecution ("You're either with us or against us!").

**9. Holy War/Civil War:** Death to the unbelievers! The two sides are divided into extremely hostile, uncompromising factions. Anyone claiming to be neutral is regarded as an enemy by both. The war spreads rapidly, and is fought to the bitter end. Wasting of lands, razing of cities, and massacres of civilians become routine. The war lasts 10-100 years. The PCs must either take sides, or find some distant refuge (which will inevitably become involved...).

**10. Mass Insanity and Delusion:** Large numbers of people are afflicted by hallucinations, irrational or violent fits (15% chance for each PC to be affected), and there is no cure. Villagers cower from fanciful fears or are oblivious to reality — "I don't see any army of trolls approaching." Another possibility is Dancing Mania (10% chance to strike a PC on any given day), which causes character to dance uncontrollably for 2-8 hours after which they will sleep for twice the amount of time they danced. The event lasts from 3-12 months (50%) to 1-8 years (50%). This also gives the GM an opportunity to play mind games with the party, describing encounters differently for each person, for example.

**11. The Anti-Magic League:** Some say that magic must be believed in for it to work. A band of magic doubters wants to suppress its use. They tell the common folk to disbelieve in magic because it is used by the privileged few to oppress them. They might employ magic-negating or magic-eating objects. They buy or steal every magic item they can and destroy them. They picket, harass, and even attack spell-casters and magic stores. They pressure, bribe, and blackmail government leaders to pass laws restricting the use of magic, to require all magic items to be registered, licensed and taxed at an exorbitant rate, and to outlaw production of new magic. If a substantial part of the population begins to disbelieve in magic the GM may reduce the effectiveness of spells. Certainly if a wizard doesn't have faith in his own spells they won't work! The League lasts 2-9 years.

A variant on the Anti-Magic League is the "Magic Goes Away" scenario where some unknown force slowly reduces the power of magic. For starters, the most powerful spells won't work, any spell has a chance of failure, magic items lose their abilities, everyone gets extra magic resistance, and damage from magic is halved. A series of long, arduous quests is needed to save the magic.

**12. Cult of Personality:** A mighty and charismatic new leader has arisen, and the masses flock blindly to his banner. He is worshipped by his fanatic followers, and demands total, unthinking obedience. He reorganizes society to suit his whims. His agents, secret police and informers are everywhere, looking for the slightest signs of dissent. Any who even dare to question his policies are treated with the utmost severity. The leader survives 3-30 years, after which his regime crumbles.

**13. Massive Social Change:** Government collapse and anarchy; the invasion of a countless horde of unstoppable barbarians who kill everyone who resists and enslave the rest; a revolution that turns the social order upside down — knights, nobles and the wealthy are dispossessed and despised, while peasants rule; mass migrations of strange peoples or monsters; technological advances, like gunpowder, steam engines, space travel, or a new religion which causes enormous amounts of controversy and contention.

**14. Nature Goes Wild:** Normal weather patterns are disrupted. Fierce storms appear out of blue skies, or maybe it blizzards in August. Domestic animals become violent, untamable, and run away. Ordinarily inoffensive wild animals become hostile and vicious (watch out for that rabbit!). Monsters reproduce at an astounding rate and are more active. Weeds thrive while crops fail. Killer vegetation spreads with an alarming frequency. This lasts 1-4 years. The party must find the source of the trouble and extinguish it.

**15. Megamonsters:** What about introducing ultrapowerful creatures that can't be destroyed by

*"I played in one campaign where there were two characters who outlived the destruction of a previous world; one got a .45 pistol and a carwash, while the other changed classes and went up several levels."*



any means? It's up to the party to creatively minimize the destruction caused by the megamonster's rampage, and help restore order in the wake of disaster. This gives them a chance to save people rather than killing things. Although the rampage only lasts 1-20 days, you can be sure the monsters will be back.

**16. Revenge of the Little Folk:** What if all of Faerie and their ilk became implacably hostile towards humankind? The GM should create an appropriate reason for such a conflict, possibly involving the party. ("We didn't know it was the ancient crown of the first dwarven king, made by the greatest smith of the elves, when we chipped out the gems and melted it down! Honest!") Sneaky elves and cruel dwarves would make both forests and underground settings doubly dangerous, and don't forget the nuisance value of other wee folk. Non-human PCs would be considered traitors by their own races and would be mistrusted by humans. The conflict continues until peace is made or the short people are exterminated.


**17. Climate Change:** This event occurs over a long period of time (1-20 years). The change is permanent. Weather becomes worse; temperate areas could become much colder, fertile regions turn to deserts, increased rainfall changes land into swamps, glaciers cover the mountains, oceans rise, etc. The party can adventure in arctic or tropical environments without leaving home!

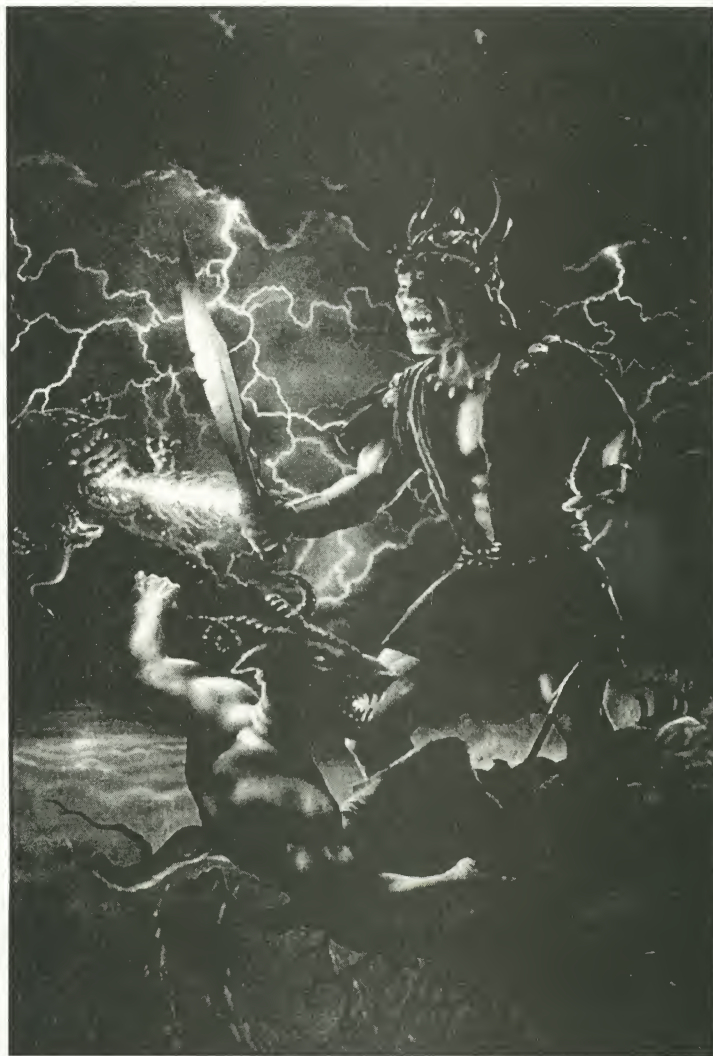
**18. New Lands Discovered:** A new and reputedly wealthy region is open to trade, conquest, and colonization. Land companies, private expeditions, merchant ventures, and all sorts of speculators, stock traders, and swindlers spring up overnight. Everyone wants a share, and supplies and transport are in short supply and then only at exorbitant prices. A significant part of the population either runs away to the new lands or is shipped there involuntarily. No one wants to be left behind. The actual status of the find is up to the GM. In any event, it's likely only a few will profit, and hardship, poverty and bankruptcy will descend on the rest whether they stay or go.

**19. Cataclysm:** Widespread destruction is caused by a colli-

sion or near-collision with a planet or asteroid, the wrath of a deity, battles between ultra-powerful creatures, weapons of incredible potency, evil or out-of-control magic, etc.

Continents sink, volcanic eruptions obliterate cities, mountains crumble, earthquakes shatter the landscape, and so on. Characters who survive will be living in a greatly changed world. I played in one campaign where there were two characters who outlived the destruction of a previous world; one got a .45 pistol and a carwash, while the other changed classes and went up several levels. Well, the ways of the gods (or GM) are inscrutable.

**20. Ragnarok:** So you really want to end your campaign? Don't just call it quits. Wrap things up with a bang. Start off with themes #1 or #6, and bring in some of #2, #3, #4, #7, #8, #9, and #10. The big finale can be #19. 





## Comment From Our Readers

J. Gamer  
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*Attn: Scurrilous Comments By Post*

We have a slightly different format this month. Many of our letters have had some subset of the questions below in them, so it seemed like a good idea to resurrect a format from the *Edge* *Auto Days* and answer them one by one. —D.J.T.

**Q:** I want to send you an article. What format should I use?

**A:** Well, first you should send us a self-addressed, stamped envelope requesting our Writers' and Artists' Guidelines, which explains all of that. The short form is: send us some sort of word-processing file on a 3.5" disk and we'll probably be able to read it — we're on Macintoshes, but have a slew of translators. If you have any doubts, just send straight ASCII text. The most important thing to include is a printed copy of the article, because paper is a more robust medium than floppies.

**Q:** Where is {Fin|Joel|G,B,&U|H,L,&S|CERK}? I really liked it and I miss it.

**A:** They're all back this issue. Most of these have had some sort of hiatus over the last couple of issues for various reasons, but now seem to be back on track.

The "Hook, Line, and Sinker" name went with Jolly, as did the *Knights of the Dinner Table*. We've preserved the HL&S format, but it has undergone a name transplant and is now "Lights, Camera, Action!" The reason for its intermittent vanishings over the last couple of months can be traced to a shortage of submissions for it. That's a hint, folks; our address is in the sidebar on page 3.

"The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly" has also returned this issue, with characters by the popular Larry Granato (also appearing in "The Big Event") and illustrations by the redoubtable Intern Jen.

"Close Encounters of the Random Kind" is back with a vengeance this issue, with Matt Stevens' "Scenario Creation System," a GM tool for building plots with the roll of a die.

*Fineous Fingers* and *Joe Genero* have had a few technical problems, but those seem to have been ironed out. Things look to be back in the groove in the comics department.

**Q:** Do you *really* look like the picture in the sidebar?

**A:** "The accused stood mute and a plea of *nolo contendere* was entered by the court."

**Q:** Gee, the last chunk of the magazine looks as if you're just filling pages.

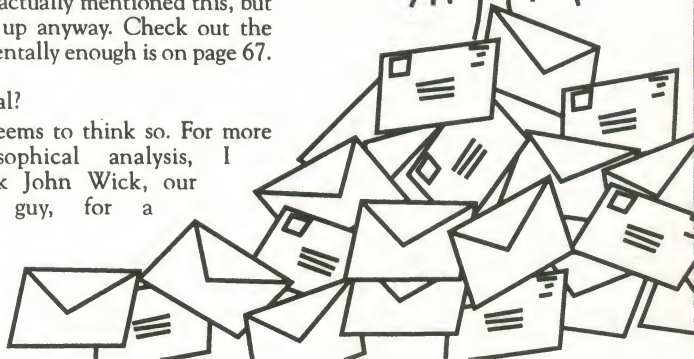
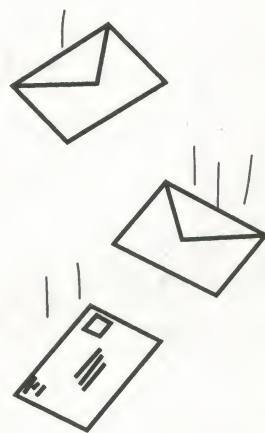
**A:** Stripecy sidebars do not automatically leach all of the content out of a page. People who have actually *read* the *Edge* have noticed (sometimes at length, and thanks for the comments!) that there's honest-to-goodness useful material in there: reviews, our miniatures section, Lester "Dragon Dice" Smith's *Weasel Games* column, and so on.

**Q:** Aren't you guys up for an Origins award again this year?

**A:** OK, so nobody actually mentioned this, but I wanted to bring it up anyway. Check out the ballot, which coincidentally enough is on page 67.

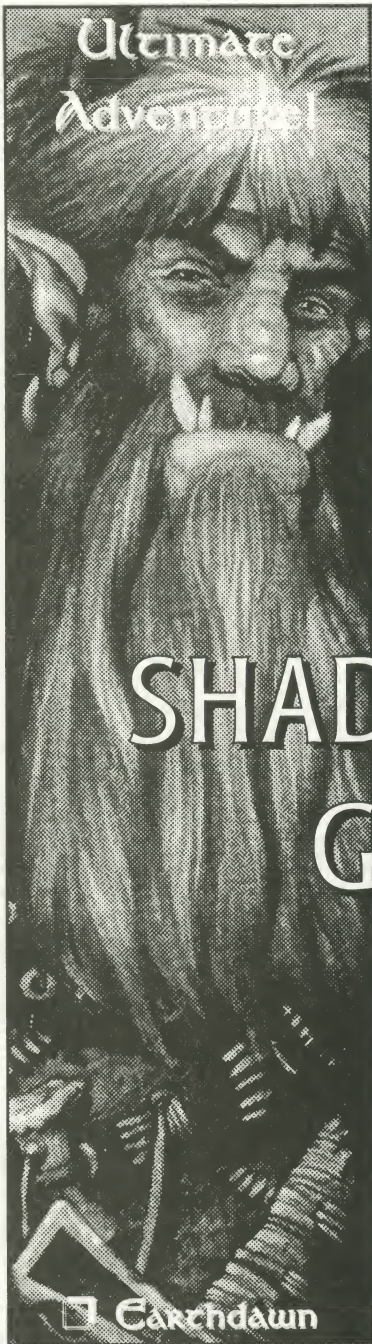
**Q:** Is Intern Jen real?

**A:** She certainly seems to think so. For more complicated philosophical analysis, I recommend you ask John Wick, our philosophy go-to guy, for a dissertation on solipsism as it relates to advice column writers. ☺



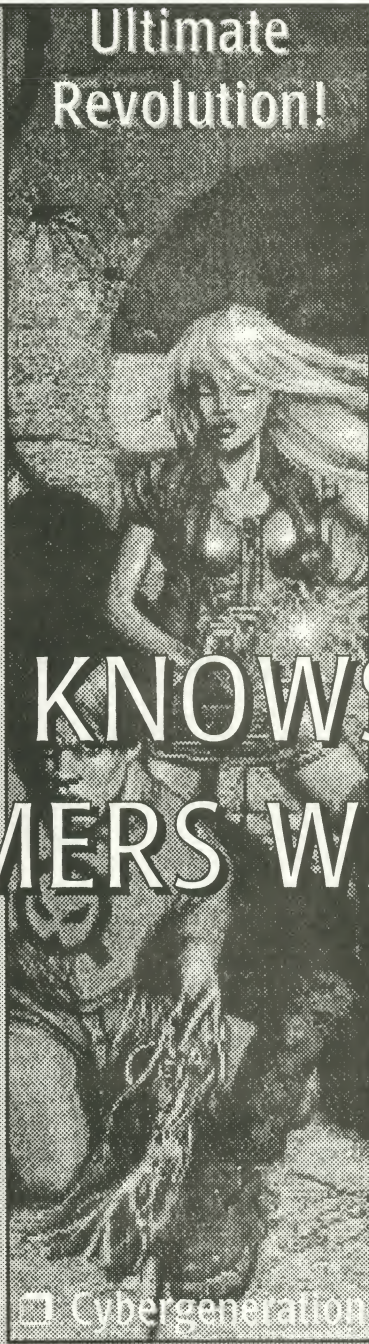


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# Causoban, Part Two

## Introduction

Last issue, Part One of Causoban gave an overview of the history of the city, a peek at the Five Masters, and hints about "the Deep City," an organization that is smuggling slaves out of the most prosperous slave market in Barsaive. This issue, we take a more detailed look at Causoban, including a look at the Deep City movement and a series of short adventures and a the outline for a campaign against the villains that rule the City that Laughs at Death.

## Section One:

### Places To Go, People To See

#### The Crossed Swords Tavern

The Crossed Swords Tavern is the favorite hang-out for sailors in Causoban. It is a three-tiered wooden building, quite an anomaly in the stone city. It was built by a sorcerer who is reputed to be immortal — at least, that's what he says. The first floor is the tavern proper, filled with laughing, drinking and eating sailors and a youthful Troubadour who's a bit wiser than his years. The second floor are the rooms for rent. They are clean and simple, providing a soft bed, a wash basin and a window. The third floor are the private living quarters of the three owners of the tavern: Syn, Otto and Litani. The sign over the door

of the place shows a human and elven sword crossed with a large axe over a keg. What cannot be seen, however, are the many "tunnels" that meet under the Crossed Swords, and the secret entrance in the kitchen to the Deep City.

#### Syn, Immortal Spellcaster & Barkeep

Syn is the bartender at the Crossed Swords Tavern and a spellcaster of no small ability. He has mastered Spellcasting and Grimoire Magic and has begun to dabble in Raw Magic. Long ago, he was given an enchanted medallion that keeps him young, thus enabling him to become so diverse in his talents. Some Obsidimen and Dwarves remember a powerful mage named "Syn" before the Scourge, and if these two are one and the same, he is very old indeed.

Many wonder what Syn is doing tending bar in Causoban, and the truth of the matter is that he is smuggling slaves to freedom. There are many "tunnels" in Causoban, allowing free movement under the city. The Crossed Swords is located on a nexus of those tunnels, mostly artificially constructed by Syn's magic.

Syn appears to be a young, handsome man in his mid-twenties. He has a rakish grin and can mix quite a wicked drink.

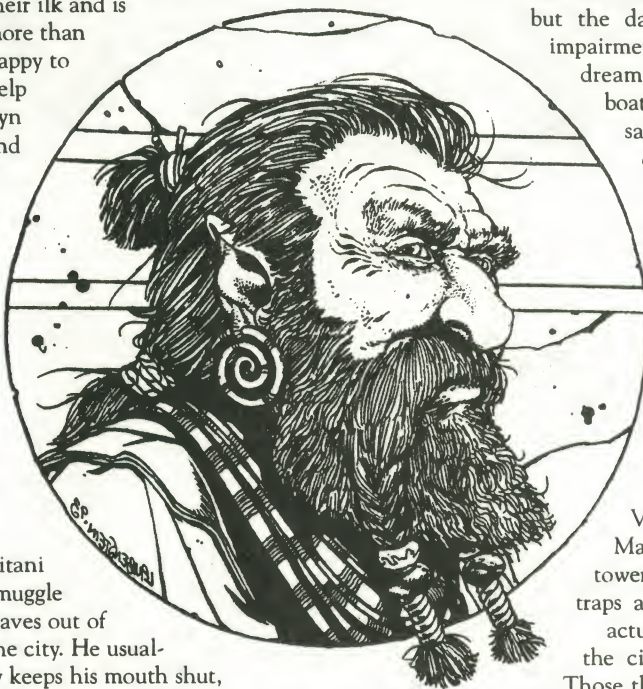
By  
**Kevin Jones**  
Illustrations  
supplied by  
the **FASA**  
Corporation



## Otto, The Indomitable Doorman

Otto is the Ogre Warrior that stands by the door of the Crossed Swords. He makes sure that the tone of the place remains friendly. "Otto" got his nickname from Litani; his real name was a bit too gruntish for her tastes.

Otto isn't a particularly bright Ogre, but he is particularly strong and was once a slave himself. He despises slavers and their ilk and is more than happy to help Syn and



Litani smuggle slaves out of the city. He usually keeps his mouth shut,

but when he does speak, he does so in small sentences and smaller words. He is friendly to those whom he views as kind and he is intolerant to those who are not. The beggars of Causoban are very fond of Otto, and often bring him small trinkets they find on the streets. Otto wears them like badges on his chest. He saves what others do not eat and distributes it to the beggar population whenever he can.

## Litani, Elven Assassin

Litani is the "silent partner" of the Crossed Swords Tavern. She is a beautiful elf who was sold into slavery just after the ending of the Scourge. She was bought by a Questor of Vestrial and trained in the "subtle arts" before she met Syn. He gave her a new identity and a new chance at life. She has followed him ever since. Now she uses her expertise for Syn's smuggling operation. She follows the Assassin Discipline (see Appendix).

## Jerek, Young Troubadour

The young lad with a limp in his right leg is the tavern's Troubadour. He was born in a tavern and has been surrounded by their culture since before he can remember. Now, at the tender age of fourteen, he can sing their songs and tell their stories better than they can. He gained his limp three years ago when one of Gurtog Greytooth's gang got a little too drunk and broke the boy's leg. More than a score of sailors came to the boy's aid, but the damage had already been done. His impairment has kept him from his fondest dream: becoming a sailor himself. No boatswain in his right mind would hire a sailor with a bad leg when he can hire one with two strong legs. So, Jerek sings and tells stories in the tavern for the sailors, and gives 25% of what he earns to Syn and his partners.

## The Temple of Vestrial

### The True & False Temples

There are actually two temples to Vestrial, the Mad Passion of Deceit and Manipulation. The tall, black foreboding tower is an empty building filled with death traps and paste jewels and fools gold. The actual temple is located under the ruins of the city theatre outside Causoban proper.

Those that follow the Path of Vestrial (called Questors) are the most deadly killers in Causoban, possibly even in Barsaive. Their devotion to the Passion of Deception has given them dark powers, and their master, D'thm Slorn, has created a plot so intricate, that even the Masters of Causoban may be powerless to stop it (see *The Lesser of Two Evils*, below).

The true temple lies below the theatre in the ruins of the old city. A keystone must be turned in order for the doorway to open, and the long climb down is treacherous. Once under the city, one finds intricate walkways (some filled up chest-high with water) that lead to every part of Causoban. The "temple" includes a simple statue of a cloaked figure holding a broken mirror. This is the idol of Vestrial the questors worship, a hidden figure that offers a twisted look at one's self.

## D'thm Slorn, Master of the Subtle Arts

Slorn is a tall, dark elf, although no one in

"The "temple" includes a simple statue of a cloaked figure holding a broken mirror. This is the idol of Vestrial, Mad Passion of Deceit and Manipulation that the questors worship, a hidden figure that offers a twisted look at one's self."



Causoban has ever seen enough of him to confirm this. He is perpetually cloaked in black, his features hidden away by an articulate iron mask. He is a master of disguise, and has put enough poisons through his system to make him immune to common venoms and resistant to most of the exotics. He is currently plotting to overthrow the Masters of the City, although his plan is so subtle that none would ever know that the power structure had even twitched, let alone fallen apart. He knows that there is one in the city that was trained in "the subtle arts", because he bumped into her one night during a mission, but he has been unable to locate her since.

The legends of his activities in Causoban are the stuff of children's ghost stories. Tales of him walking through walls, holding his breath for days, and even infiltrating a merchant's home as a concubine are told by every Troubadour in the city. He allows these tales to be told, for they make the truth even more difficult to perceive. Slorn even disguises himself as a Troubadour and goes to tavern houses to spread the tales himself.

### The Temple of Dis

The Temple of the Mad Passion of Slavery is the tallest building in Causoban. Its majesty reflects the wealth and power (and decadence) of its master, Thoren Tügel. There are twelve floors to the building, with the Slave Master living at the top of the tower in the lap of luxury, waited on hand and foot by the most beautiful slaves in Causoban. The tower is filled with riches beyond belief, and it is every thief's dream to break into the tower and pilfer the wealth therein. However, wealth allows for the best security money can afford, and that security would be D'thn Slorn's assassins. All Tügel needs to do is allow the rumor that D'thn Slorn's assassins are the guardians of the tower to keep it safe. Slorn approves, making appearances at the tower and during Tügel's parties to keep the tale fresh in Causobanian minds.

Tügel holds lavish parties, often drinking himself into a stupor. There have been three assassination attempts on Tügel since he became Causoban's slave master, despite the presence of Slorn. This has caused Tügel to question the assassin's motives, although he cannot provide enough evidence to directly confront the Master of the Subtle Arts with a charge of conspiracy. However, he is willing to hire freelancers to investigate the possibility ... (see *The Lesser of Two Evils*, below).

## Section Two: Lights, Camera, Action!

### 1. The Walking Disease

**Lights:** There's a panic in the city. Corpses are rising up from their watery graves and walking about the city. These zombies are harmless — they just walk about in a sleepwalker's trance — but they are rather disturbing. Rumor has it the cause is the Waterfall Horror.

**Camera:** A merchant approaches the party. He wants to hire them to find his brother who's been seen walking the city streets. He wants his brother found and cured of the walking disease (as it is called) and he's willing to pay them very well for their efforts.

**Action:** The zombies are victims of the Curse of the King of the Beggars. The King's Curse (as his subjects call it) is the result of a magical poison that drops the victim into a death trance. The victim gets buried (dropped in the water), and in three days time rises again, bloated with the water and half-eaten by the carnivorous fish in the lake.

### 2. "Big Eye!"

**Lights:** The "streets" of Causoban are always crowded. Tight bridges and walkways mean everyone is shoulder to shoulder lest they get pushed off into the swift riverway. As the party is trying to move along, one of them bumps into an old beggar woman. She spits on the offending party and looks at him with a pus-filled, bloated, cataract-clouded eye. "I give you big eye!" she says. "Big eye!" Then, she shuffles herself off into the crowd and disappears.

**Camera:** The offender starts to experience really bad luck. Everything seems to go wrong. Everyone around the offender seems to give him a suspicious glance and it's like an aura of doom has befallen the poor offender. Of course, if he seeks out mystical assistance, anyone will tell him that he's just fine and look at him like he's a kook.

**Action:** There is no curse. The old woman is just plain nuts and thinks she is a witch. Of course, don't tell the party this. Every time you have to make a roll for the offender, make it a secret roll and shake your head sadly if he fails. If he succeeds, whistle, wipe your brow and say "You made that one by the skin of your teeth!" Make all the NPC's appear to be suspicious: it's just his imagination working overtime. And when he goes to get "the curse" lifted, of course the mage is going to look at him like he's crazy: He's obviously not cursed!

"As the party is trying to move along, one of them bumps into an old beggar woman. She spits on the offending party.... "I give you big eye!" she says. "Big eye!" Then, she shuffles herself off into the crowd and disappears."



### 3. "A Friend In Need ..."

**Lights:** The party is in the Crossed Swords Tavern when they see a fight break out between one of Gurtog Greytooth's crew and a small man. The crew member is a huge Ork who is smashing the little man into a mess of blood and broken bones.

**Camera:** One of the party members recognizes the little man from their past. If there isn't an existing reasonable connection, make one up. The little man looks up from his beating and sees the party member and recognition flashes in his bruised eyes.

**Action:** The party has a choice. They can come to the aid of the little man, thus winning the animosity of Gurtog Greytooth's crew, or they can watch as someone they know gets pummeled to death.

### 4. "Watch your hands, buddy."

**Lights:** The party is in the Crossed Swords Tavern when they encounter a lovely young lady named Jaqlyn. She flirts with each of them, sits in their laps, runs her fingers through their hair and makes a general nuisance of herself.

**Camera:** The next night, Jaqlyn shows up again in the tavern, but this time, she treats the party as if she doesn't know them. When they try to re-establish the flirtations that went on the night before, she puts them down with the skill of a sword master.

**Action:** Jaqlyn isn't schizophrenic; she has a twin sister, Charlyn. Jaqlyn is a thief and Charlyn is a sword master. Jaqlyn loves setting her sister up in uncomfortable situations, and once the sword master has figured it all out, she'll apologize and offer to buy the party a round of drinks. The sisters will make valuable allies, for both are highly skilled and have many contacts in the city.

### 5. "The Magic Egg"

**Lights:** This one's to be used when you've got a thief in the party who likes taking things without letting the others know what he took. The next time your thief goes pilfering through pockets, slip a beautiful porcelain egg into his palm. It's expensive and obviously magical (glowing with an unearthly light).

**Camera:** The night after the pilfering has taken place, one of the other party members gets a visit from a strange demon. It pops out of nowhere, completely taking the PC off guard. It's huge and ugly and mean. It shouts in a shrill voice: "Give me the magic egg!" and proceeds to smash the

poor PC into the ground, all the while shouting "Give me the magic egg!" This happens to each of the PCs one by one. There's nothing they can do to the creature, it seems invulnerable to any attack they try to muster and only strikes them when they are alone.

**Action:** The creature is actually a horror bound to the egg. When the egg was stolen, it creates the creature who proceeds to smash the thief's closest friends. Only when the thief returns the egg to the rightful owner will the creature's attacks come to a stop.

### 6. "Let the waters flow."

**Lights:** When the PCs are out on the town, they bump into a running figure. He's completely out of breath and bleeding profusely from a head wound and a wound in the chest. He's sweating and coughing a painful hacking cough and he takes one look at the PC and whispers: "Let the waters flow," just before he dies in the PC's arms.

**Camera:** As the days pass, the PC's will notice dark garbed individuals following them wherever they go. If they try to approach the dark garbed fellows, they disappear into the crowded streets. Then, one night, one of the PC's wakes up with an assassin on his chest, holding down his arms, ready to slit his throat.

**Action:** The man that ran into the PCs was a merchant who happened to overhear the plans of the City Executioner. He plans to overthrow the Masters of the City and rule it for himself. Of course, the party now becomes liabilities and must be eliminated. More on the Assassin's plot can be found below.

### 7. "An offer you can't refuse."

**Lights:** The party gets involved in a bar fight and gets arrested. Now they have a choice: Serve as Thoren Tügel's bodyguards or get sold off as slaves in the next auction. The choice should be easy.

**Camera:** The party shows up to a magnificent party to serve as bodyguards for Tügel. There is no security other than them. The City Executioner is their boss, but he gets called away on another task and leaves the party in charge.

**Action:** It's all a set-up. The party is going to get framed for the assassination of Tügel. The Assassin's Guild has managed to break into his room and plant all the incriminating evidence they need. If the party doesn't catch on, they'll be slaves for sure.



## 8. "Two graves"

**Lights:** Jaqlyn (see "Watch Your Hands, Buddy" above) is going to do something rather reckless. She's going to break in to the Temple of Vestrial and steal whatever she can get her hands on. Of course, she reveals to her closest confidant that the real reason she's breaking in is for revenge. A long time ago, her brother was killed by a questor of Vestrial, and she recently saw the man again (he has a black glass eye that she recognized). She makes the party promise that they won't tell her sister about her plans. Whether they do or not is up to them, but Charlyn will not be happy about it.

**Camera:** The party breaks in to the Temple of Vestrial with ease. It's much too easy. Of course, they'll soon realize that the Temple is really empty, the whole building is a front for the real Temple located across town (in the ruins of the theater).

**Action:** However, the questors have set up many traps for those who decide to break in to the tower to keep them from revealing the truth. There are also magical alarms to let the questors know when someone has broken in. Give the party about an hour to get out of the place before the questors arrive.

## Part Three:

## The Lesser of Two Evils

### Introduction

The Lesser of Two Evils is a long story for your Earthdawn campaign. We've provided alternate entry points for the campaign, so it doesn't matter where your players start, they'll all end up in Causoban, one way or another. The campaign can be used with the *Lights, Camera, Action!* section above, padding out the outline provided here, and there are suggestions on how and when to use each one.

The plot revolves around the Assassins of Vestrial and their Master, D'thn Slorn. Slorn intends to dethrone the two men who overtly control the city: Thoren Tügel and Uthar Duldred. He intends to do this by drawing them into conflict with each other, and the if your party gets in the way, well that's just too bad for them.

### Part One: Thieves In The Temple

The party can be drawn into the plots of the Assassins of Vestrial in many ways. The first and most obvious way is through "An Offer You Can't Refuse" which can be found in Section Two. Another way to get them involved is by getting a favorite NPC sold into slavery, thus bringing them to Causoban and drawn into the Assassin's plots. Yet another way is to have the PCs get sold into slavery. Have them on a ship, get them attacked by pirates, have the pirates overrun their ship and *bang!* there they are in Causoban, serving Thoren Tügel as indentured bodyguards.

Once they're in Causoban, have one of the bosses approach them about being bodyguards. Both Thoren and Uthar are rather nervous because there's been a great deal of dastardly dealings going on, and both have lost many men due to attrition. Despite his best efforts, Uthar is going to lose the party to Thoren. Thoren simply has more resources at his disposal. Their boss will be D'thn



Slorn, a tall elf who never reveals his face to anyone. He is constantly

wrapped in black clothing and his features are hidden by an elaborate iron mask. He constantly puts his life in danger to protect

Thoren Tügel, an act which will definitely raise some eyebrows in the party. If they ask him why he risks his life for a scumbag like Thoren, he will answer with a soft laugh and say "If you have to ask, you will never understand."

## How To Use "Lights, Camera, Action!"

(and "What if I don't play Earthdawn?")

It's simple, really. LCAs are designed to give you the framework of an adventure. You take the "story seed", adapt it to your own campaign and run with it. Even if you don't play *Earthdawn*, you can still use the Assassins of Vestrial, the Crossed Swords Tavern and everything else in this article. Just change a few of the names (to protect the innocent) and go from there.



In this part of the campaign, send some small fry assassins against the party. Each of the assassins will provide little clues, pointing to Duldred. Once Thoren has been shown the clues, he will begin to consider open war on the Guildboss, but Slorn will suggest something much more subtle. "Why not blackmail?" he'll suggest. After all, if the other guildmasters discover that their Grandmaster is lowering himself to hiring assassins, he would lose respect in their eyes, thus threatening his position. Tügel will agree to this plan and send the party as messengers.

When they arrive at Ulthar's place, they will discover that he has also killed assassins in his home, and these fine folks have left evidence incriminating Thoren as the client. He will tell the PCs that he doesn't care for blackmailers, but understands that they are only doing their job. Then, he will offer them the opportunity to become spies for his operation. He will offer a mighty reward and amnesty should the Slave Master discover their treachery. He makes the offer nearly impossible to refuse (that shouldn't be too hard considering they were forced into the deal in the first place) and sends them back to Thoren with the information he has given them. If they refuse, he smiles and says that he understands and doesn't even mind if they tell Thoren of his offer. But he reminds them that the offer is always open: a high reward and freedom from indenture is a tough bargain to pass up.

## Part Two: The Deep City

There are many ways to continue this story to its conclusion, but any way you take it, the Assassins' game plan remains the same. They want to bring the two bosses to the brink of war. Once they start fighting each other, the Assassins will have no problem picking them off. Each of the *Lights*, *Camera*, *Action* bits in Section Two can be incorporated into the plot to drive it to its conclusion. Each time the PCs get into some kind of trouble, they'll have to answer to D'thn Slorn and Thoren Tügel. Slorn will always make cryptic suggestions to influence their perceptions of the situation and Thoren will become more and more suspicious of anyone who gets close to him. Of course, the plot will take a real violent turn when Slorn uncovers the Deep City.

One way or another, Slorn will discover the hidden tunnels Syn and his partners are using through the expansion of his own. When this occurs, he will find another excuse for the two bosses to go for the throat. After all, isn't Syn a member of the Brewers' Guild and doesn't that affiliate him with the Master of All Guilds? Obviously, Uthar is using Syn to smuggle slaves

out of the city, thus striking at the heart of Thoren's status and resources. Once Thoren discovers this, he will be outraged, declaring all-out war on Uthar and Syn.

## Part Three: The Broken Mirror

By this time, Thoren is convinced Uthar is out for blood. He will dedicate all of his resources to destroy the Master of All Guilds. This, of course, includes the party. If the party becomes too much of a fly in Slorn's ointment, he will show his trump card: he's known all along that they've been spies for Uthar. Once Thoren discovers this little fact, there will be little chance for them to survive in Causoban. They will have to go to Uthar for sanctuary (or to the Deep City, if it still survives). The party will have to pull off some serious magic to keep the city from falling apart... but who is to say it shouldn't? After all, if Uthar and Thoren destroy themselves in a war that neither of them can win, who is to say that they shouldn't? The fact of the matter is, they have a choice. They can allow two evils to destroy themselves to serve a third, or they can thwart Slorn's plans and reveal everything they learn to the two bosses. It isn't an easy choice, but it is theirs to make.

## Conclusion

Causoban is only a skeleton of a city. It still requires many details to fill in, but these details are yours. Things have been left vague so you can make Causoban truly yours. Have fun with it. Good luck and may you and your players find fun and fortune in the mighty city of Causoban!

## Appendix: The Very Optional Assassin Discipline

The Assassin Discipline should not be made available to PCs. It has been included for the purpose of introducing the Cult of Vestrial in this article and has not been balanced with the other Disciplines. While there may be those who have escaped the clutches of the Cult (as Litani has), these are the exception and not the rule. The Masters of the Subtle Arts are not only master assassins, but master manipulators as well. All those that enter the Cult (voluntary and otherwise) are controlled through mind-altering drugs and sorceries to keep them in line.

**Important Attributes:** Dexterity, Perception & Charisma

**Racial Restrictions:** None

**Karma Ritual:** To perform a Karma ritual, an Assassin must sit in a place of complete shadow and meditate on emptiness. This focuses his Karma on becoming one with the stuff of shadow.

"One of the other party members gets a visit from a strange demon. It shouts in a shrill voice: "Give me the magic egg!" and proceeds to smash the poor PC into the ground...."



**Common Artisan Skills:** Acting, Runic Carving, Juggling (sleight of hand)

## TALENTS

### Circle One

Melee Weapons, Climbing, Karmic Ritual, Read and Write Language, Silent Walk, Avoid Blow

### Circle Two

Durability, Speak Language, Empathic Command

### Circle Three

Spellcasting, Acrobatic Strike

### Circle Four

**Karma:** The Assassin may spend a Karma Point on any action using Dexterity only.  
Thread Weaving (Shadow Weaving), False Sight

### Circle Five

**Spell Defense:** The Assassin's Spell Defense increases by one.  
Anticipate Blow, Disarm  
Mechanical Trap

### Circle Six

**Karma:** The Assassin may spend a Karma Point to raise the damage of any melee weapon.  
Disarm Magical Trap, Steely Stare

### Circle Seven

**Social Defense:** The Assassin's Social Defense raises by one.  
Melee Weapons, Second Attack

### Circle Eight

**Spell Defense:** The Assassin's Spell Defense raises by one.  
Poison Resistance, Cobra Strike

### Circle Nine

**Shadow Cloak:** Same as the Tenth Circle Thief ability, but use Shadow Weaving instead.  
Surprise Strike, Conceal Weapon, Second Weapon

### Circle Ten

**Physical Defense:** Raise the Assassin's Physical Defense by 2.  
Slough Blame, Whirlwind

### Circle Eleven

**Blood Weapon:** Same as Blademaster Thirteenth Circle Keen Blade ability.  
Weapon Breaker, Defense

### Circle Twelve

**Shadow Kiss:** For the cost of 2 wounds, the

Assassin may use blood magic to strike at an opponent from a hidden location while still remaining hidden. No bonuses are gained for those who search for him, it was if the blow came from nowhere. The Assassin must be using Shadowcloak to use this ability.

Chameleon, Wound Transfer

### Circle Thirteen

**Recovery Test:** Assassins at the Thirteenth Circle may make an additional Recovery Test a day.  
Show Armor Flaw, Body Blade

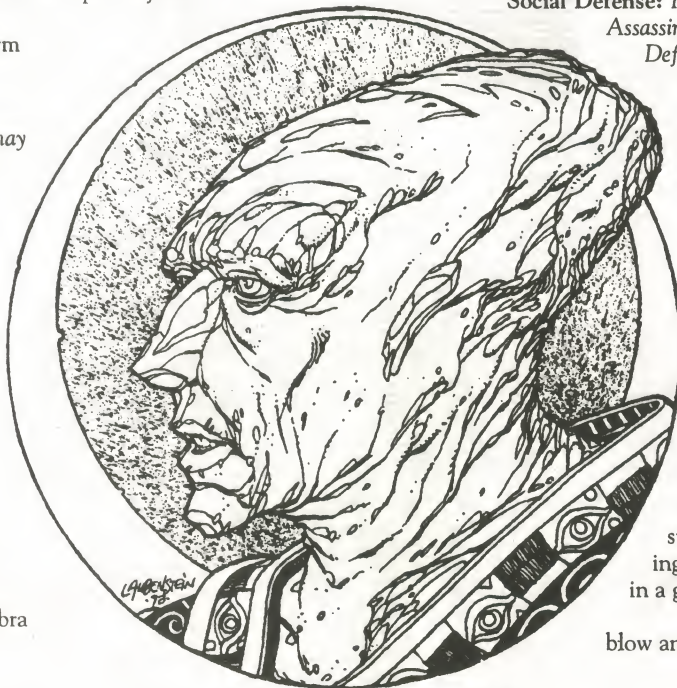
### Circle Fourteen

**Initiative:** The Assassin's initiative raises by 1.  
Evidence Analysis, Multi-Strike

### Circle Fifteen


**Spell Defense:** Raise the Assassin's Spell Defense by 1.

**Social Defense:** Raise the Assassin's Spell Defense by 1.  
Second Chance, Soul Shatter



While the Assassin may at first appear to be a whirlwind of death, he in fact is not. The Assassin is a master of the "first strike," allowing him to get in a good debilitating blow and then run for his life.

The training of Vestrial Assassins begins very early. Homeless children are often the perfect recruits for the Questors of Vestrial. Young minds are easily filled with the lies Vestrial has prepared for them.

The training continues through adolescence as the youth becomes more and more adept at the "subtle arts." The youth learns acting, disguise, languages, anything that allows him to gain the confidence of a victim. For it is not the way of an Assassin to strike at an unknown stranger, but to get as close as they can to their victim, to gain their complete trust, and then to put a poisoned blade in their side. That is the Way of the Subtle Art. 



# సత్యం విజయం





# Key of Green

by Douglas Hulick

From the world of Talisanta by Daedalus Entertainment

Fahldrash found me at the edge of the former temple buying a drink from a water peddler.

"Quite a mess you have here, Sellas," he said as he came up beside me. "Your people make it, or are you looking for the cause?"

I finished off my water before answering, handed the ladle back to the peddler.

"Better not let Zyranna hear you say things like that," I said. "Wouldn't be healthy."

The Rahastran laughed. "No, probably not."

I shook his dark hand, met his blue eyes with my green. "I need a reading," I said.

"I figured as much." He drew a deck of triangular cards from beneath his blue fustian cloak and began absently shuffling them. "Standard rate?" I nodded. "All right," he said, "Then I need to get in there."

'There' was the burned out remains of the Temple of the Ten Thousand, up until last night the main center for the Paradoxist Cult in Cymril. More of a bordello and tavern than a true temple, the place had embraced the chaotic and care-free tenets of its Zandir founders in true hedonistic style. Now, it held only charred bones and the threat of riot.

I escorted Fahldrash past the sentry line meant to keep the gawkers at bay and into the still smoldering ruins. He stopped near the center, pushed a few pieces of debris around with his foot, turned over the top card of his deck, wandered, repeated the process, wandered some more, and finally found a suitable spot. I picked my way over to him as he cleared away some rubble and spread a small rectangle of cloth on the ground.

"What do you have so far?" he asked.

"Not much. The local sentry captain got here just after things started, managed to keep things under control until the Lyceum sent a couple aquamancers over to put out the blaze. They had one hell of a time, too, from what I understand."

"How so?"

"This place was made of stone and crystal, not wood." I picked up a bit of debris, rubbed it between my fingers until it crumbled to ash. "Know anything that will make crystal do that?"

Fahldrash gave a low whistle. "If I did, I wouldn't be working freelance for you, that's for sure. Now I know why the Key's involved."

"As of this morning," I said. There was some concern about possible Zandir retaliation for the burning, but the bigger worry was the upcoming Magic Fair. With Cymril's signature event less than two weeks away, the powers-that-be wanted the situation wrapped up and tucked away before nasty rumors began to circulate. Bad for business and all that. Lucky me, I had been handed the whole mess before breakfast.

Fahldrash crouched down beside the cloth he had spread, tilted his neck until it cracked, squared his cards. "So what exactly did you want to know?"

"What else?"

Fahldrash shook his head. "I'm a cartomancer, Sellas, not a visionary. I can't simply lay the cards and give you a name. Be a little more general."

I rubbed a hand along the back of my neck, noted it came away full of soot. General? What else was there at this stage?

"Fine. How about 'why'? Give me a motive to work with."

The Rahastran nodded, began shuffling the twenty card deck. After about a minute, he drew the top two cards and laid them down on the cloth. One held the image of a Mandalan, shaved golden head bowed in contemplation. The other depicted a dark circle against the night sky.

"The Mystic and Zar, the Dark Moon," he said. "Not the best signs, Sellas."

"What a surprise."

"Hmm." He tapped the Mystic with a finger. "This fellow usually means some sort of hidden knowledge, but given the circumstances, I'm more inclined to look at it as indicating a secret, or maybe a hidden agenda. As for Zar..." Fahldrash rocked back on his heels, stroked his beard. "One of two things. The first meaning that leaps to mind is dark magic, which obviously refers to all this." He waved at the blackened pile around us, then reached down to push Zar up against the Mystic.

"But together... together, I lean towards a less common interpretation of the Dark Moon — a cabal. So, a hidden agenda combined with a cabal." Fahldrash grunted. "Looks like you've got a conspiracy here, Sellas, and nothing simple, either. We're talking deep and twisted."

"Great," I said. "So much for simple arson."

The cartomancer fingered his deck. "I wonder..."

That made me nervous. "What?"

"Well, sometimes a secondary lay can clear things up a bit. Or not."

"Or not?"

He shrugged. "All depends on the card."

I sighed, knowing I would hate myself in a



few seconds. "Go ahead."

Fahldrash turned over the next card, placed it below the other two. A smiling Zandir stared up at us, glowing star in one hand, empty purse in the other.

"Looks like Zyranna," I said. Except, of course, she was a woman.

"The Charlatan."

"Exactly."

Fahldrash shook his head. "No, I mean the card. He means either deception or a mistake. In this case, deception."

"So let me get this straight," I said. "There's a deep conspiracy behind this fire, and it involves some kind of deception."

"Exactly."

"Nothing personal," I said, "but I should have hired a diviner."

Fahldrash gathered up his cards, shook out the cloth, and stood. "The cards hardly ever lie," he said, smiling.

"I feel so much better. Let's get out of here."

Despite the sun and the crowds, the street felt cool by comparison. I bought another dipper of water, sprung for Fahldrash as well. As we drank, I noticed a familiar rainbow making her way towards us.

"Water?" I said as she stopped before me.

Zyranna made a face. "Ugh. Please, not after noon." My lieutenant's normally seductive, multi-hued clothes were a mass of stains and tears. Her hair had escaped its silver bands to droop darkly before her eyes, and the intricately painted designs on her topaz skin had been all but washed off by sweat. Despite it all, though, Zyranna still managed to look dashing; something in the Zandir blood, I suspected.

"Now, if you have any Tazian fire ale..." she added.

I waved the water peddler away. "Well?"

Zyranna's face turned grim. "Nothing yet. I talked to all the right people in all the right alleys, even knocked a few heads together, and came up with zero."

She fell silent, and I could feel it hanging there, waiting to be said, to be shouted. I saw it in her eyes, read it along the set of her jaw. It was circulating in every Zandir's mind right now, probably in a lot of non-Zandir heads, too. I stepped up, opened the gates.

"But..." I said.

Zyranna's eyes looked past me, flashed at what she saw. Right there, across the street: the enemy.

"But it's only a matter of time before we find them at the bottom of it," she said.

I turned around, regarded the temple of Aa.

At its door, a stern-faced priestess looked out over the crowds, her white robes a stark contrast to the desolation I had just left. Two white armored guards flanked her.

"Aamanians," Zyranna spat. "Lobotomized orthodoxist pigs!"

"Maybe," I said evenly, "But that doesn't prove anything."

"Proof? Who needs proof? They tried to subjugate the Paradoxists for four hundred years, tried to crush our faith, our souls!"

"Your faith," I said, "Not mine: I'm Cymrilian, remember? And they failed."

"They're just craftier now. Mark me, Aa is behind this."

I frowned, turned back to the ruined temple that was our business. "Well, before we go hanging every Orthodoxist in sight—"

"A good idea if I ever heard one," muttered Zyranna.

"Before that," I said, turning pointedly to Fahldrash, "We have a new working theory."

Zyranna followed my look. "Oh?"

The Rahastran cleared his throat. "Conspiracy."

The Zandir looked back at me. "That's it?"

"A complex conspiracy," he added. "Involving deception."

Zyranna thought a moment. "Gray Petal?" she asked.

"Gray Petal," I agreed.



Since its inception a little over seven years ago, just after the beginning of the Beast Wars, the Silent Legion had gone through a metamorphosis: from intelligence network, to hidden operations, to defensive terrorism brigade. Now, two years after the end of the Wars, we had become an internal security force. Theoretically, we covered all of the Seven Kingdoms: in reality, we worked mainly for Cymril and its Wizard King.

Somewhere along the way, the Legion had picked up the cognomen "Keyhole Corps", or just "The Key," and like all bad things, it stuck. So when Gray Petal's pet whip greeted me as "Key-man," I could only shut up and take it.

Gray Petal was not your typical Muse. Oh, she was tall, nymph-like gorgeous, and had butterfly wings to die for, but that was just the packaging. The difference was inside. Instead of staying put in her sylvan homeland of Astar and frolicking the days away, Gray Petal had chosen to live amongst us plodding, telepathically mute non-Muses. All for the sake

of art.

All Muses practiced their art to one extent or another, but not all of them were as dedicated, or as different, as Gray Petal. Her art was the Art of Espionage, and if it ever bothered her that her life was based on a turn of phrase, she had yet to show it.

We met in the back of an herbalist's shop. Drying roots and bundles of leaves hung from the ceiling, giving the place the feel of an eerie, pungent jungle. I had sent Zyranna to check with her contacts at the Lyceum Arcanum about what may have caused the fire; Fahldrash I had simply paid and sent away.

Gray Petal's whip, Gryxx, flitted back and forth in the air before me, his wood-colored brows crinkled into a frown.

"You're here about the fire," said the overgrown wood spirit. No wise cracks, so he must be translating, turning the Muse's telepathic images into words. Gray Petal was about five feet away, absently smelling a bundle of brittle, off-yellow flowers. I addressed myself to her.

"We think it's more than simple arson," I said.

Gray Petal smiled softly. The whip snorted. "Duh! Even I can figure that one out, green-hair." Gryxx paused, translating. "So why was the Key assigned?"

"Damage control," I lied. "There's some concern about Zandir reprisals."

The Muse raised an eyebrow. "Please," said Gryxx. "The only thing the Zandir will be upset about is having to find a new brothel."

"Maybe," I said, "But you're right: the Key's more interested in the why, not the how."

"You have to start with the 'how' to get to the 'why' on this one, Key-man," said the whip.

"Already done," I said.

"The if you want 'why,' you gotta pay."

Now came the hard part. I could never predict what Gray Petal wanted, rarely knew what particular trail she was following at any given moment. One visit, a simple street address had been enough; another, a three hour dialogue on the state of Kasmir-Sindar trade relations had been required before getting any sort of information.

After a bit of haggling, we settled on what I knew about the rise of militant mage factions in the government. I'm the first to admit I know next to nothing about magic (not as unusual for a native Cymrilian as many might think), but when it comes to people and policy watching... well, I can hold my own. My oration lasted maybe half an hour. By the end I was starting to develop a headache from all the warring aromas in the air.



"So, about the temple..." I said.

Gray Petal turned her placid gaze my way. Suddenly my mind was filled with images and emotions. Telempathy. The sensation was both wonderful and unnerving, and I knew I was being honored in a manner I could never repay.

There was a spider's web, points of dew glistening on its like captured stars. Caution there. After that, the fire at the temple, three figures walking out of the flames: each moving in the other's shadow, hiding their features, even their races, from me. I felt confusion, knew it as a clue. The temple, a store, an inn, two dead Zandir, a tavern; loss welled inside me. Then, in rapid succession: purse, gray cloth, white cloth, trees, a falling bird, the Consulate where the ambassadors from each the Seven Kingdoms resided, the old wall along the Kasmir border, a Beastman, an eye. And it was done.

I blinked once, took a shaky step back. Gryxx giggled.

"I...thank you," I stammered. My tongue felt clumsy and slow compared to what I had just experienced.

Gray Petal opened her mouth, moved her lips. "My pleasure," she said in a voice as smooth and sweet as nectar.

Outside, I could not stop shaking for almost a block.



I ended up at Deket's, a predominantly Sindaran tavern just off Hotan's Way. Since it was a warm evening, the walls had been lifted via winch and pulley up to the second level, opening the ground floor to the night air and blue glow of Laeolis, this month's moon. It was quiet in Deket's just then and I was able to enjoy a late dinner in peace.

The only other customers were a trio of Sindarans a few tables away, deeply engrossed in a game of Trivarian. I had never learned the game, and since the two halves of my brain could not operate independently of one another — a requirement for playing, I was told — I had pretty much given up any notions of trying. Still, I distracted myself from time to time by watching the tall, near-cadaverous players make their moves, mumbling and scratching their bony crests all the while.

I needed two brains at this point, too — maybe even a third. I had written down Gray Petal's images as soon as I came down from the encounter and been mulling over them ever since. Some were fairly obvious, such as the spider web, which signaled the conspiracy, and the "list" of places she had given me: tem-

ple, store, and tavern, among others. A late afternoon and early evening of digging through Key archives at the Citadel had revealed unsolved crimes, all violent, at each of these sites. Each incident had somehow involved Paradoxists as targets. The Temple of the Ten Thousand was only the most recent and grandest of what looked like a string of terrorist acts. I still had nothing on the Consulate or any of the other images the Muse had given me, and by the time I had left the Citadel, I was so sick of the case I had headed across town to Deket's, where I knew I would be left alone.

Naturally, Zyranna found me just as I was ordering an after dinner drink.

"Make it two," she said to the waiter as she slid into the chair opposite me. "Ooh, seriette," she added, dipping her finger into the dessert that had just been delivered. "I love this. The sauce makes it, you know."

I sighed, pushed the pastry her way. "How'd you find me?"

Zyranna arched her eyebrows. "You forget, I am a charlatan, an all-powerful and all-knowing seer." She took my fork and attacked the seriette. "Besides, you always come here on nice nights."

I smiled, made a mental note to change my

routine again.

"So," I said, "Any luck at the Lyceum?"

Zyranna swallowed, nodded. "I talked to a few faculty members. It's thaumaturgy. Whoever did it, they used some hybrid form of red menace that not only started the fire, but also changed the elemental nature of the material it consumed. Basically, it made the crystal and stone flammable. I'm surprised the aquamancers were able to put the thing out."

"Flammable crystal?"

She shrugged. "Sure, why not? I'm no thaumaturge, but from what I understand, they can use quintessence to alter the nature of just about anything."

"So we're looking for a thaumaturge," I said.

"Nope."

The drinks arrived and I took a long swig of aquavit. "Explain," I said.

"We're looking for whoever stole the modified red menace. A thaumaturge by name of Uldran reported the theft of some of his wares three weeks ago. I talked with him earlier, found out he's been experimenting with red menace on the sly without reporting it to the Cymrilian Wizard's Council." Zyranna pushed aside the empty plate, turned to her drink.

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## Key of Green

"Convenient 'theft'," I said.

"I thought so, too. That's why I threatened to deport him for the experiments."

"Names?"

She shook her head. "None: he was too scared of whoever bought the stuff to roll over. I've put him under surveillance. How'd it go with Gray Petal?"

I leaned back, rolled the glass of aquavit between my palms. "It was... interesting," I said, and went over my encounter with the Muse. Zyranna listened in silence, then had me repeat the images I had seen.

"Dead Zandir, white cloth, and an eye," she said bitterly.

"Among a host of other things."

She shook her head. "It has to be the Eye of Aa, which means Aamanians. I knew it!" Zyranna picked up her cup, stopped with it half way to her lips, slammed it back down on the table. "Who else?" she yelled. "Who else would burn down our temple?"

I slapped the table in turn. By now, all the eyes in the tavern, and half of those on the street, were looking our way. "Stop!" I said, barely keeping my own voice down. "I will not let you turn this into a personal crusade, lieutenant."

"It's beyond personal, Sellas. It goes back too far to..."

I leapt half-way out of my seat, leaned across the table until our noses almost touched. "I don't care how much your two peoples hate each other," I said in my Special Tone of Voice, "You're keeping it in check as of now. You still work for the Wizard King of Cymril, not the Caliph of Zandu. Got it?"

We glared at one another for a half minute before she finally relented.

"Fine," she snapped, slumping back in her chair. "So what next?"

"Next," I said, resuming my seat, "we try and link the Aamanians to your thau-maturge."

I enjoyed watching her jaw drop. "But..."

"It's the best theory we have right now," I said. "I just want to approach it at a little less than full speed. So, assuming the white cloth, among other things, means Aaman, then the gray cloth..."

Her eyes narrowed. "Revenants?" she said. "Oh, hell."



The problem with trying to question Arimites is that they don't like to talk; not just to Cymrilians or Zandir, but even to one another. They're a dour, drunken, and dangerous people overall — just the type who would come up with something like the Revenant cult.

Revenants specialized in revenge-for-hire, but to me it seemed the for-hire part always came before the revenge aspect of their trade. Want a threat delivered, an enemy removed, or, say, a temple burned? Put a note on the right wall, drop a pouch of coins behind the proper pile of trash, and the deed is good as done. The Key estimated a little less than half the population of Arim was somehow associated with the Revenant cult. Given the influx of Arimites into Cymril in the past twenty years, I figured there to be a good two hundred core members in the city itself by now, with twice as many "fringe" Revenants rounding things out.

Despite my promise to myself, I was forced to return to the Citadel the next day to talk to our resident expert on Arim's main cult. She briefed me, then helped arrange the sending of a message. The missive went out that night; come noon the following day I was walking in the Cymril Bazaar, an Arimite called Rokag at my side.

"You Key?" asked Rokag.

"You Revenant?" I rejoined.

Rokag grunted. "I know people who are." He was shorter than me, broader, with a dark complexion and the profile of a hawk. He kept his thick fingers in his belt, close to his throwing knives. I noticed an unusually high percentage of Arimites in the crowd around us; but then, there were an unusually high number of Cymrilians watching the Arimites, too.

"Same with me and the Key," I said.

"Hmph. Now that we're both confirmed liars, what do you want, Key?"

I smiled despite myself: I liked this cut-throat's style. "Information on some Revenant handiwork."

"Such as?"

"The Zandir temple a few days ago."

"Why?"

"I don't want it happening again."

"Won't — no more temple to burn." He gave a brief, mirthless grin. I stayed silent. Finally, "What makes you think it was Revenant?"

"I know about a few things, all hired by the same people. Inns, stores..."

Rokag hemmed to himself, a deep rumble that filled the air around us.

"A pair of dead Zandir," I added.

The rumbling stopped. "Revenants don't

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betray contracts."

"No," I said, "But they cancel them."

"For a price."

"You heard my offer in the message."

He waved a hand in dismissal. "Worthless."

"From what I understand, the Revenants in Cymril don't see eye to eye with those in Arim. You're more enterprising, they're more traditional."

"They cling to the past," said Rokag. "We pursue the future." This meant the Revenants in Cymril cared nothing about revenge, the supposed Revenant by-word, and everything for profit and power.

I shrugged. "Not my place to judge, but I know those in Arim have been making things difficult for the Revenants of Cymril. The Key might be persuaded to help you this one time."

"How?"

"Revenants don't kill Revenants," I said.

"So I hear."

"The Key is not Revenant."

Rokag stopped suddenly, regarded me with a hard look. There were tents and booths to either side of us, and I wondered if I could kill him and make it out of the Bazaar before his men cut me down. Rokag stepped in close, and at least two dozen people around us began reaching for their weapons.

"You know what you offer, Key?" he whispered. "The Revenants of Arim would declare war on your Secret Legion."

"Only if they suspect us, which they won't," I said just as softly. If I had it my way, they would suspect the Revenants of Cymril.

Rokag narrowed his eyes, stared up at me. "And for this payment, you would ask...?"

"No more contracts from your employers and no terrorism during the Magic Fair."

The Revenant reached up to play with his mustache. "That's a lot of business to lose, Key."

"The price of freedom," I said.

He shook his head. "No, I cannot. It is too much. But..." Rokag let go of his mustache, smiled an evil smile. "But I will do this: who do you believe has been hiring us for these things you speak of?"

"Aaman."

"Yes and no. You look too far afield, Key: often the best vein of ore lies on your own land. You go where they want you to go, not where the truth is."

"No names?"

"Names are unimportant in this. It is about entire peoples." Rokag stopped, nodded to himself in satisfaction. "That is enough."

Now it was my turn. "No. Nothing during the Fair, or no deal."

Rokag glowered up at me for a long moment. "The Key's reach is long," he decided. "The Fair shall be safe. You will get the names of those I wish visited by the Key."

There was no hand shake, no words of agreement. We simply turned and walked away from each other. Zyranna met me after I had gone fifteen paces.

"Well?" she asked.

I smiled. "Better than I could have hoped."



Sitting in the foyer of the Consulate, I ran over everything in my mind again. It had all sounded good over hot mochan after breakfast, but now the giddiness of too little sleep was turning into doubt and fatigue.

Zyranna and I had sat up the rest of that day and all through the following night trying to piece together what we knew. We had taken our own information, mixed it with Gray Petal's visions, and added the advice given to me by Rokag. Just to be safe, we checked Key files on Aaman. Slowly, a picture had begun to emerge that neither of us liked. Still, it accounted for every image, every fact, every hunch we had.

"Too many holes," I said. "We're guessing."

"Nothing is known," said Zyranna, quoting a favorite Paradoxist maxim.

"Yeah, but the stakes are high this time."

"Our butts, you mean?"

"Yeah."

A door opened behind us. "The under-ambassador will see you now."

Zyranna and I exchanged a look, got up, and went into the office of K'chee Skra, under-ambassador for Vardune and unofficial representative of that kingdom's answer to the Silent Legion, the Hreer.

K'chee got up from his desk and came around to meet us, smiling. Although supposedly devolving from a flighted to a land-based species, the Aeriad still had a vestigial beak and wings, and a good amount of plumage. K'chee was green, marking him as one of the less temperamental, more contemplative of his race, as opposed to the high-strung Blue Aeriads. The aide who had shown us in left, closing the door behind himself.

"Sellas," said K'chee, "Nice to see you again. And Zyranna, isn't it?"

I nodded. "I'm afraid this isn't a social call, K'chee." He looked from myself to Zyranna

and back. "You're under arrest," I said, "For violent acts against the people of the Seven Kingdoms and Cymril."

"Excuse me?"

"The Temple of the Ten Thousand," said Zyranna bitterly. She raised her hand, uttered a word, and the doors and windows of the room closed and locked themselves.

"Don't want our little bird to fly away," she explained.

K'chee's eyes went wide as he retreated behind his desk. "Sellas, I don't know what you think you're doing, but—"

"We've worked it all out," I said. I sounded tired, felt even worse. "It was a nice, twisted game, and I'm still not sure of all the details, but I do know the Hreer were behind it."

The Aeriad held up a hand. "Wait, are you saying I... we burned down a Zandir temple? Feathered ancestors, why? We share a common enemy — the Aamanians! Why would a member of the Seven Kingdoms risk alienating a friendly civilized western kingdom like Zandu?"

"We asked ourselves that," I said. "And came up with one answer: the Beastmen."

"Beastmen? Sellas, you're not making any sense: that war's been over for two years."

"Exactly," I said. I moved around the desk, got in close in case he decided to try and be clever. "But Cymril and most of the other kingdoms are still looking eastwards because of it, throwing their resources into a Wilderlands defense."

"Except Vardune," said Zyranna. "Your kingdom is too far west to worry about the Beastmen, aren't they, K'chee? The Aeriad are more worried about their immediate neighbors. Aaman."

K'chee puffed out his plumage. "We've made no secret of our displeasure with Cymril's recent policies, if that's what you mean. But I don't see—"

"You framed the Aamanians," I snapped. "Every target you hit was Paradoxist. You knew sooner or later someone would put that connection together and blame Aaman — it's the natural conclusion. Once that happened, attention would shift westwards, and you wouldn't have to sit that long frontier alone anymore."

Zyranna had gotten the three figures in the fire: Arimite, Aamanian, and one other. The three layers to the conspiracy. Following the logic of white cloth for Aamanian, gray cloth for Arimite, we had looked at the tree in that light as well. There were a number of races the tree could have implied, but the falling bird cinched it: the devolving Aeriad. After that, it had been an easy leap to see the



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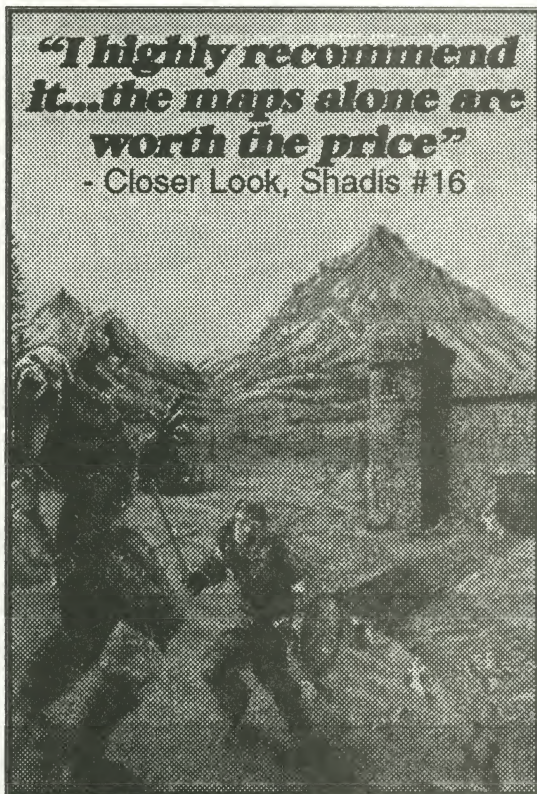
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## Key of Green

Consulate as the source of the plot, not a target as we had first suspected, and the wall at Kasmir and the Beastman as symbols of discord.

Then again, we could have been completely wrong, the victim of too many of Zyranna's alertness spells. Could have, but weren't.

K'chee tried to bolt using a pair of magical bracers he had on to fly towards the skylight overhead. I leapt at him, missed, but Zyranna clipped him with some sort of magical discharge before he made open sky. He fell back to the floor an unconscious green heap.

I was proud of Zyranna: she didn't even kick the under-ambassador once for what he had done while she was putting on the enchanted leg-irons.



Two nights later, I was having dinner at Deker's again when a carefully cloaked figure sat down at the table beside me. Even with the disguise, I noted a distinct lack of any sort of facial or body hair on the person's exposed skin. Aamanian ritual depilation.

"What do you want?" I asked without turning.

"To thank you."

"Go to hell."

There was a brief pause. "What you did for us...it will not be forgotten. The affair with the Zandir temple—"

"Look," I said, aggravated by the Aamanian's presence, "I did what I had to do."

"Nevertheless," she said, "The children of Aa are grateful. Your name will be spoken to the Heirophant, Sellas of Cymril: Aaman will repay its debt to you."

Great, just what I needed: friends in the wrong high places. "Let it go," I said. "You just happened to not be guilty this time, is all."

"Do not be so certain."

I stopped eating, looked over at her in astonishment. The priestess bowed within her cloak. "Praise Aa, and bless you."

"Wait!" I said as she rose and turned away. "What are you trying to...?" But one of her guards was there, armored and hulking. I let her go.

I turned back to my dinner and took a long drink of aquavit. Starting tomorrow, I decided, I was definitely changing my routine.

**SHADIS TWENTY-FIVE**



# FERALS

## A NEW YOGANG FOR CYBERGENERATION

**T**he year 2027 of the Cyberpunk world has a wide variety of Yogangs, unofficial youth organizations dedicated to the pursuit of specific lifestyles, fashions, and social causes.

Presented in this article is a new Yogang type for use in your CyberGeneration campaign. Said my some to be an offshoot of the Tribals or Squats, this particular Yogang has its own very unique view on the chaotic world of the 21st century. They are commonly known as Ferals, the latest offspring of Generation X.

### FERALS

*"Evolve or die. Darwin had it right."*

*"The dead guys think they're living beyond the wilderness. They're so wrong."*

*"Humans are obsolete. We're the new future."*

As a Feral, you're aware of how much society is changing. Rather than shy from that change, however, you embrace it. After all, adaptation is the key to survival. The raccoons taught you that. So did the rats and the crows and the cockroaches. They'll all be around long after humanity has choked itself to death, and so will you.

You know the city. Not the useless tunnels within the Arcologies, or the stinking sewers, but the real streets. One day everything will fall apart,

and the city will be your kingdom. Until then it's your playground, filled with the dying ranks of the old species. The revolution is a nice idea, but change will happen anyway. The corporate towers will fall someday, and when they do your kind will be amongst the few survivors.

### WHAT YOU LOOK LIKE

Taking a lesson from the most adaptable urban species, you wear as little clothing as possible. After all, when everything falls apart you're going to have to be used to the cold. What clothing you do wear is made of very durable materials, and is primarily dark in color or patterned in urban camo.

You use body paint as well, or have tattoos if you can afford them. These cover your entire body, and usually imitate such patterns as raccoon rings, or other forms of natural camouflage. You might choose to take on more specific pattern, such as brickwork, and if you have a light complexion or hair color you probably try to darken it. Not that you're interested in slinking around in the shadows, but there's no point advertising your presence to the dead guys if you can help it.

A satchel or utility belt is also common wear, to keep your loot and weapons. Your world has only one rule: Survival of the fittest.

BY SERGE  
STELMACK

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*-Measure for Measure*

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## Awakens in April.





## SUBCULTURE

Taking a look at Darwin's theory of evolution, it is easy for you to see that humanity is on a one-way road to extinction.

The whole society, based on non-renewable resources, is suffering more and more from pollution and is riddled with decay and corruption. Its members consist primarily of mindless drones who work to death without complaint, and its leaders are concerned only with amassing wealth for themselves. They think they can keep their heads above the rising waters of urban violence and corruption, but they're wrong. You've seen the future, and it holds a message of doom for the cancer known as humanity.

To prepare for the coming twilight of human civilization, you have studied your city intensely. Every street, alley, walkway, and bridge is known to you, and you constantly work to keep track of the city's expanding borders. In the remotest corners of the sprawl your Yogang has amassed caches of food, weapons, ammo, and tools. Every part of Feral subculture revolves around preparation for the fall of society, and you are committed to toughening up your mind and body.

When not busy putting together caches of supplies, you and your Yogang like to either hang out at your communal den, or prowl the streets. Observing the activities of other youths is especially entertaining, and you take delight in sabotaging their plans and efforts. Mall Brats are an especially favored target, and you often make a point of tripping up their operations.

## BELONGING

Ferals stem from all social levels, but what made you a part of the group was your sense of pessimism about the future of humanity. In fact, you don't even like to consider yourself to be truly "human", preferring to compare yourself with the animals of the urban environment.

As a Feral you dismiss any ideas of a bright tomorrow, and don't even like to consider the idea that society will manage to stay together another generation. Fortunately there are signs of the impending disaster every day in the news, and you like to share word of declining economic condi-

tions, ecological disasters, and resource shortages with your friends. Word of recovery or improvement on any front only serves to depress you.

It is this morbid fascination that allows you to identify with the group, along with your dedication to surviving the long awaited disaster. You regard your fellows as brothers and sisters, and see them as being the only part of your life that will always be with you. Every other relationship is doomed.

You wouldn't have it any other way.

## YOUR ALLIES AND ENEMIES

Some Yogangs have a good sense of the coming catastrophe, such as the Ecoraiders and Neopioneers. They know the score, but they're dealing with the future in the wrong way. After all, although the heart of the Ecoraiders is in the right place, they don't stand a chance of defeating the ISA.

The Neopioneers have a better idea, but they're too impatient. Why scrape out a miserable existence in the badlands when they could just wait and have an empire fall into their laps?

As for the other Yogangs, you have mixed feelings.

You feel that you share a certain amount of common cause with the Trops and Squats, seeing them as fellow (if not as successful) survivors. You also have a strange respect for the Goths, in that they seem to have an understanding that they are in fact already dead.

Your enemies include the Mall Brats, who sick-en you with their propagation of human greed, and the Rads, whose political and academic fascination inexplicably makes you angry. Perhaps you are afraid that they might be able to reform the system through their efforts, and that would anger you to no end.

## SLANG

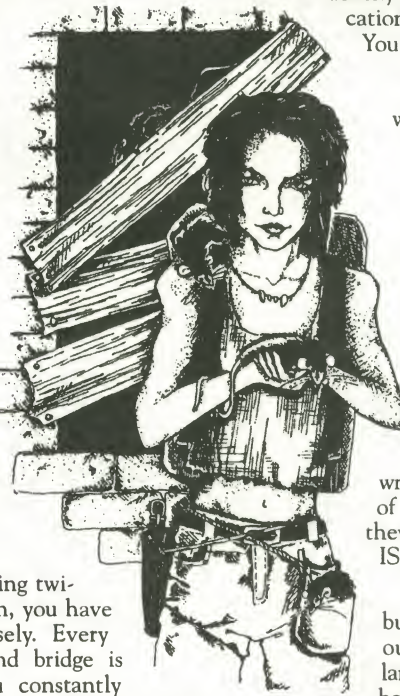
**Cancer:** humanity in general, though often used to refer to anything bad.

**Keeper:** a person, place, or thing likely to survive the coming apocalypse.

**Mug:** to interfere in the activities of others.

**Old World:** a reference to non-urban areas, such as forests or deserts.

**Pack:** a group of Ferals, who share a communal den and network of caches.



"As a Feral, you're aware of how much society is changing. Rather than shy from that change, however, you embrace it. After all, adaptation is the key to survival. The raccoons taught you that. So did the rats and the crows and the cockroaches. They'll all be around long after humanity has choked itself to death, and so will you."



**Soft Shell:** any currently powerful person or institution that shall be swept away with the fall of humanity.

**Winge:** a person or organization which supports the notion of humanity's survival.

### Yogang Skill: Urban Lore (INT)

As a Feral, it will be necessary for you to make your way around the city after the collapse. You have amassed a great deal of knowledge concerning the layout of the sprawl, including many unconventional routes and shortcuts.

You also have a very good idea where various facilities in the city are located. Not only major locations such as city hall and CorpSec headquarters, but lesser known ones such as police armories, food warehouses, and the meeting grounds of various other yogangs.


Through careful study and observation, experienced Ferals can even estimate the level of security at certain sites, and know which corporations own certain buildings. In addition, they also know of safe places to hide from the authorities, and the locations of numerous caches of food, medical

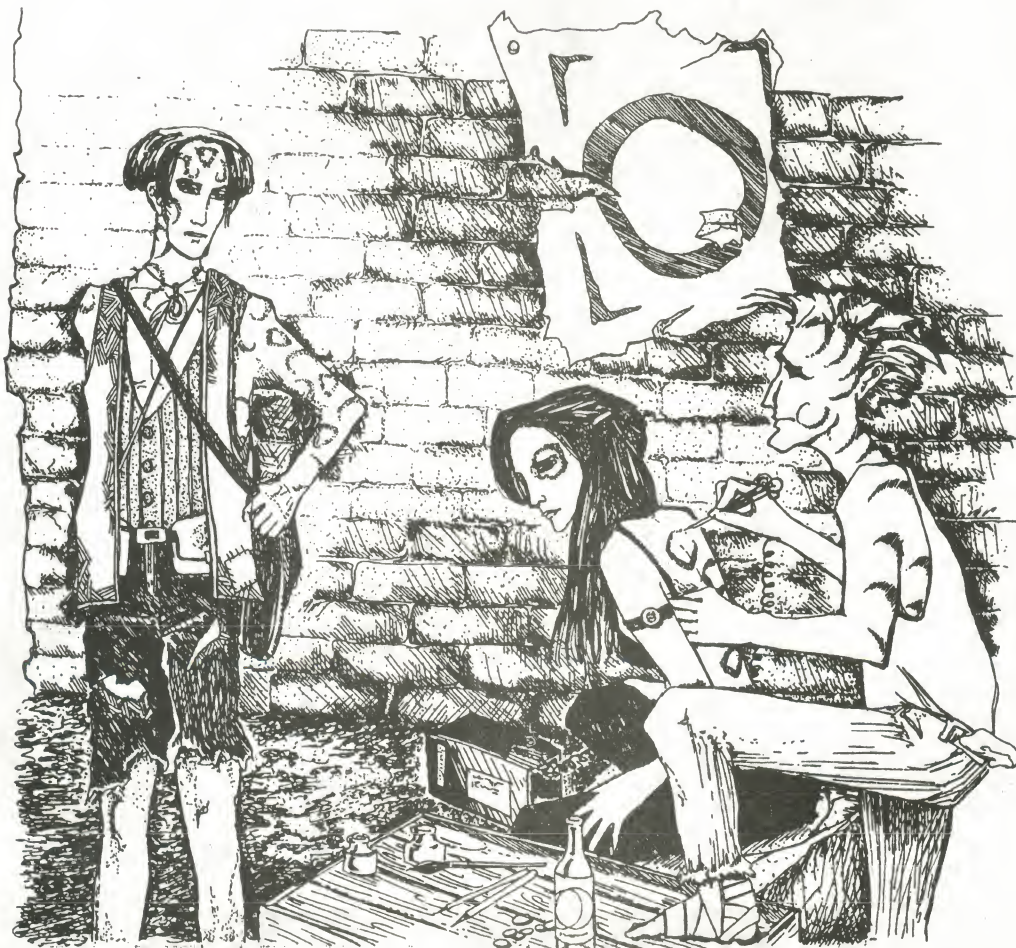
supplies, and weaponry.

With your Urban Lore skill, you can find safe places to hide during BuReloc crackdowns (Easy), know where the city's buses are repaired (Moderate), be aware of which unmarked warehouses in the city belong to Arasaka (Difficult), or where to find a CorpSec safehouse (Very Difficult).

### IF YOU'RE A FERAL:

- 1) Tell me your name, age, and sex.
- 2) Describe what you look like.
- 3) Besides your V-Trodes, pick three different things from the list below that you are currently carrying:

- Snoopbox Personal Intrusion Sensor.
- Urban Camouflage Body Paint.
- Sleeping Bag.
- Maps of Home City.
- BoosterGogg SmartGoggles.
- Knife. 





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# YYY GENERATION

## "...AND JACK

"...And Jack Left Town" is designed to be a post-introductory adventure for *Cybergeneration: REvolution* by R. Talsorian Games. Introductory characters or Experienced characters can be used, but the difficulty of encounters will need to be adjusted upwards or downwards as necessary to make this story a survivable challenge.

### The Story Synopsis (part one):

Rache approaches the group with a mission that they shouldn't refuse. They must plan and perform a raid on a fledgling software company to get a piece of software. The physical and net-based assaults on the office need to come off together to prevent CorpSec from coming down on the group's collective heads. Still, when they do finally get the data from the Corp's office, the world starts to crash down around them as various groups try to get the info from them.

### A Quick History Lesson for the GM:

Turn to page 210 of the rulebook right now, and read the entire section on Rache. He's one crazy frakin' hacker, but he's also the best there is. Two days ago, Rache was just foolin' around in one of YYY's data files when a nasty piece of black ICE started chasing him out of the system. On his way out, the Ghostlord caught a glimpse of a message from a VP at YYY about the T112 test program (see sidebar). The message was terribly informative, but gave Rache little more than a desire to crush the project like a bug. There was no doubt that info about T112 "needed to be free", but Rache also realized that T112 couldn't be accessed from the outside. As part of their computer internal security, the most secure programs could only be read or accessed from within the company compound. Rache has decided to send in a team to recover the files for him which he will then upload for a live satellite broadcast. Big Fun.

YYY has been working on Project T112 with AIM Overwatch for about 2 years, and is planning to turn over the software (for a hefty fee) very soon. YYY's software has been thorough-



# REF ATTENTION

## LEFT TOWN."

ly tested on subjects that AIM Overwatch has provided. T112 has performed marvelously in the trial runs and is such a simple and compact program that it is nearly invisible to the Wizards that run around the system (treated as stealth, FCT 8).

YYY and AIM Overwatch obviously would not like to have this knowledge become public record. Even in these paranoid and uncertain times, the callous and indiscriminate executions of T112 would be considered bad public relations. Rache has other ideas.

Unbeknownst to Rache or the players, the group has been tailed and observed for the last two months by operatives of Arasaka Corp. Using Long Range scopes and mics, as well as simply having operatives walking by at opportune moments, Arasaka has determined that the group is indeed made up of cyber-evolved children, and has targeted them for abduction in the very near future. They are simply waiting for the heat from another group to turn up, so that they will look like saviors as they "rescue" the team.

### The Set-Up:

On a crummy Saturday morning (like many other crummy Saturdays), a package arrives at the group's headquarters/domicile/whatever. It is addressed to the character with the highest REF (especially a wizard). There is no return address, except for the name "Ghostlord". Inside is a V-Smartcard, with no markings of any kind. When one of the group decides to play the video contained on the card, they see the following: wisps of smoke drift slowly up from the floor and form into the ghostly image of a man. He has no distinguishing features and is of normal height/weight/etc. After about 10 seconds, the image speaks:

"Hey pukes. You know me. I'm Rache. I know you. You're dogmeat. But right now, you're dogmeat that I need, so pay attention and you might even earn some lunch money. I got a tiny little glimpse of message of a datafile that you and I both want. You, my little darlings, are gonna get it for us. YYY has been using some poor sap wizards as guinea pigs and they've come

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up with something that's so frackin' nasty that even the Great Ghostlord is trying to decide whether or not to sweat. What it is? Glad you asked. It's bad-ass puppy dog. A Bloodhound that tracks you wannabe Raches around the network. It can follow a Wizard around the system and call enough thunder down on his backside that he'll never sit down again. Now, I wouldn't mind seeing fewer snots around the net, but that would make Alt unhappy, so I'm gonna let you do something about it.

"LISTEN UP! You've got to get inside of YYY's office and jack this card (yes, the same one you're listening to right now, weefboy) into their system. There's a little beauty I wrote that'll grab the file we want and then drop The Wrath of Rache on their system. Snap, Crackle Pop! Once that's done, all you have to do is bring the pretty card to some friends of mine at the Rock-n-Taco in the Uptown Mall, and I'll be done with you.

"Now, Here's the location of the office that's got the file. It seems that they don't trust little ol' me, because you can't access the file from an external line. They've got a self-contained system on-site to handle their most sensitive material, so you're going to have to get into the offices and get your hands on the file manually. That's right, I said 'Manually'. That's by hand. That means work. Here's the message I saw."

Have the characters make a computers roll at a 10 (schoolin' at a 15 or an INT at 20). Depending on how well they roll, give them a certain amount of information about T112. One part that they should definitely get is that YYY will be completing the deal with AIM Overwatch to give over the software on monday to allow AIM Overwatch to distribute it to the various branches of the ISA.

"You'll have to find the office of this Dr. Kisada. It should be pretty simple, even for little snots like yourselves. So, all together now: Number 1: get in the office. Number 2: jack the card to copy the files and 'Rache' the system. Number 3: delete the backups. Number 4: Do what you do best — Run like hell. Got it? Good. Any questions? [Pause until the players say something] What's that? Speak up ya half-pint! I said speak up! [pause again] Oh, yeah. I'm a recording! Ah hahahahaha! You brats are gonna have to wise up if you're





## Evolve or Die!

gonna survive this. There's a Chrystar Nova parked outside — I've hacked it with some fake codes that should fool it into working for you and get you out and back." (The Nova is stock except that it will follow the group's commands for the next 48 hours.)

If the group does not contain an netrunner or Wizard, then Rache will have to take responsibility himself for the cyberspace aspect of the operation. Read the following: "I'll be running around inside of YYY's system trying to break down their security as much as possible. But I promise you Jack. Give me a call at 555-1234 an hour before you're going to do the run." If Rache does end up performing the run (or even if the group has a wizard to do it — Rache is *very* full of himself), he will be able to shut down any of the security systems whenever he needs. He will let the heat turn up on the group, but never get too hot — he wants to see what this group is made of and is trying to figure out if he wants to use them again in the future.

At this point, the figure begins to dissipate and Rache again gets in the last word: "Oh yeah, [Fill in the name of the character that the package was addressed to]. I hope you still have that account that Morgan set up for you so long ago — I've dumped \$2,000 into it for this run, but EVERYTHING [this part is almost painfully loud] has to get incinerated afterwards. Burn your clothes. Fry a computer if you use it. If you touch something between now and monday night, it had better be smoking crackin rubble on Tuesday or your smelly asses are mine. No trails, got it?" The whips of smoke finally disappear and the Vsim shuts off.

What's next is up to your players. They've got until Monday morning to pull this thing off or T112 will go from theory to reality.

### T112

T112 is the codename of the program that YYY has developed with AIM Overwatch in order to "reduce the spread of the Carbon Plague". Almost two years ago, a netrunner on YYY's staff noticed the work of a group of Wizards for the first time. Intrigued by the near-limitless possibilities, she tried to follow some of these wizards around to learn more about them. Mostly, the wizards were wary of her and avoided her, but on occasion their egos caught up with them, and their private "audience" was given a show of power. After about six months of this, her hobby evolved into a possible commercial venture. YYY was still a fledgling software company, but when their hot-shot 'runner came to them with a plan to track the elusive wizards, they knew they had something. The bright and enterprising young hacker hasn't been seen around the halls of YYY since then, and whether she has moved on to bigger and better projects, is running this project secretly, or if she has simply been "removed from consideration" is unknown.

What YYY has developed is a piece of software

that can detect and track traces of a Wizard's movements within a system. Because of the unusual way that Wizards interact with the system, they leave a slightly different kind of trail behind them than does a typical netrunner. There are only about three people within YYY and one or two more outside YYY that are aware of these traces — most of the people working on the project just know that they are supposed to be able to follow a certain type of track.

The intended use for T112 is that if it is linked to a Anti-Personnel program, it can be sent to roaming around a company's system looking for any Wizard that happens to be wandering around, and fry 'em without ever bothering standard netrunners (either internal or external). The more insidious use for it that ISA has considered is that this same pairing could be released out into the net and Wizards would never be safe in Netspace again.

### Preparations:

Here are some things that the team can look into before they go charging blindly into the office compound:

There are floor plans of the offices available in the city planner's office, but it's closed until Monday. They could try to hack into the system to try to get the plans, and it shouldn't be very tough at all considering that the files are mostly public accessible.

Doing surveillance on the exterior of the complex will give them a summary of the exterior security including guard movements, obvious sensors, etc. A wizard/runner may wish to do an exploratory run against the company's system to try to get a feel for the system so that he or she can be more efficient at helping the rest of the group get inside during the real run. The computer security won't change between now and then, so they will face all the same protections.

Generally, give them plenty of information about the outside of the compound and what they can expect to find there, if they make some inquiries (bribes, hire someone to get the info, get it themselves, whatever). The inside (except the floorplan noted above), and especially Kisada's office should be a big mystery. No one seems to know anything about what's installed there. The men that installed the security system in Kisada's office haven't been seen around Night City since then...

CorpSec has been called in to provide a lot of additional security support for this office in the last month, because of the sensitivity of T112. While they have a lot of manpower and firepower behind them, the electronic security at YYY is minimal because they simple haven't ever been able to afford it (this deal was supposed to fix that). Allow and help the players to be as creative as possible for getting in and out of the Offices

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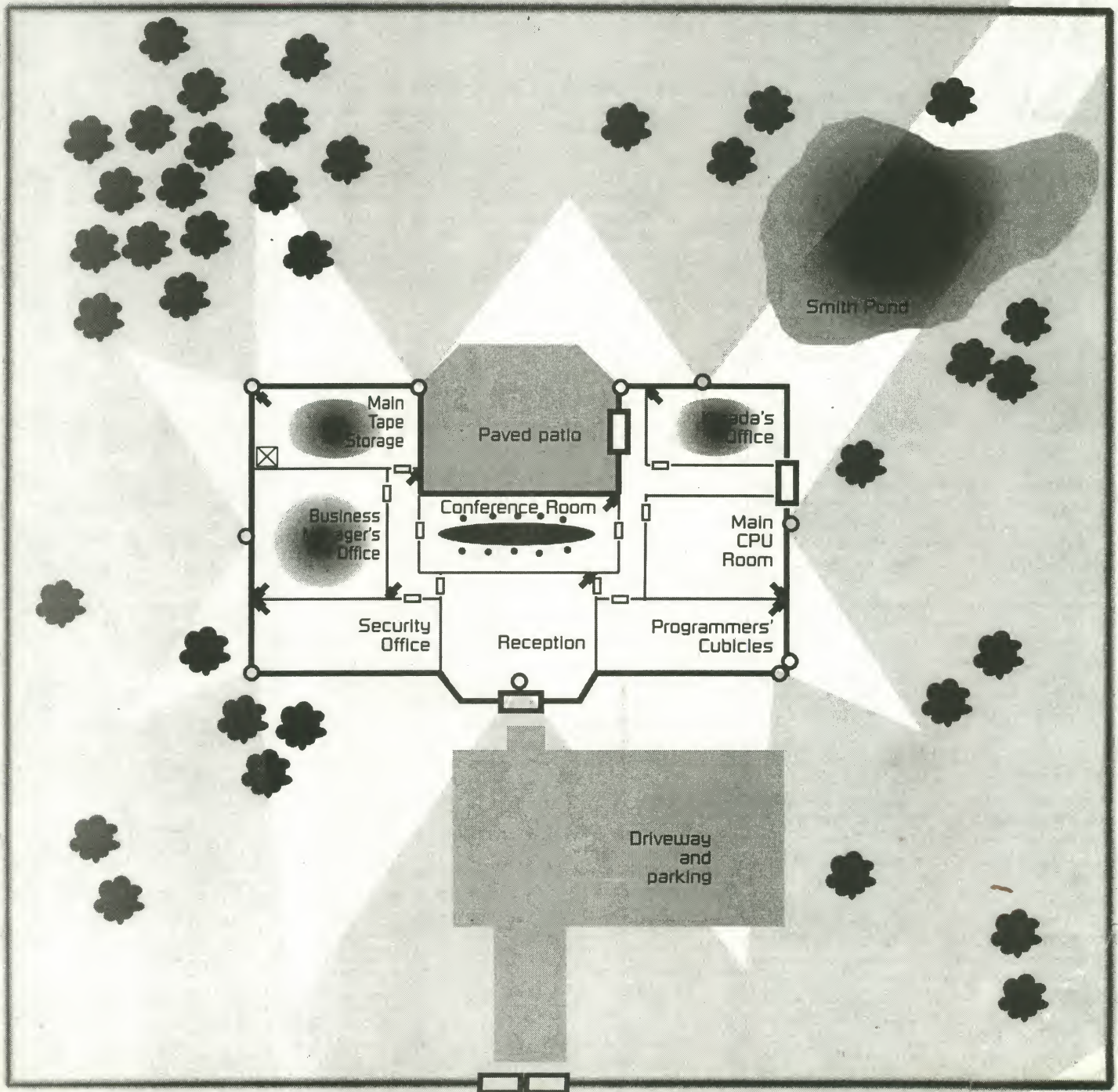
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# YYY Corporate HQ Layout



Gate or blast door



Door



Interior camera



Artificial foliage



Exterior camera  
(Field of view in grey)

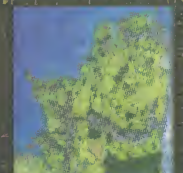


High-security rooms



Janitorial Closet (to tunnels)





## An expansion set for *Middle-earth: The Wizards™*



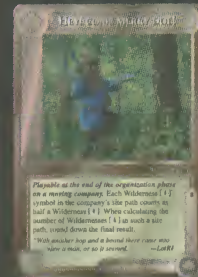
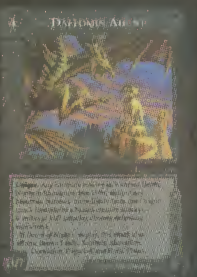
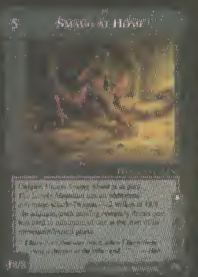
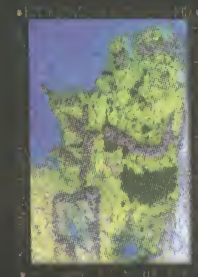
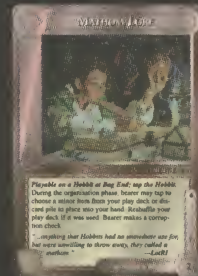
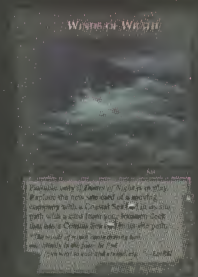
*"So the rumour of the wealth of Erebor spread abroad and reached the ears of the dragons, and at last Smaug the Golden, greatest of the dragons of his day, arose and without warning came against King Thrór and descended on the Mountain in flames."*

*—The Lord of the Rings*

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without getting into a fight with CorpSec. They just can't win a pitched battle with these guys.

## The YYY computer system

The YYY computer system is not very well defended because their sensitive material is all located on the system that is inaccessible from the net, and they are still a struggling, young company. The system is INT 11, DEF 5. Use the basic layout and security of the sample Datafort (pg 163) with the following exceptions: 1: The FCT of all programs listed are reduced by two. 2: Any reference to a human sysop is instead a FCT 4 Spy with a FCT 5 Fenris. 3: The "physical" description of the Datafort is as follows: The Datafort appears as a gothic cathedral (e.g. Notre Dame) with high, arched ceilings. Alcoves and twisty staircases lead users off to the various subdirectories of the System. There is a giant stained-glass window of the YYY company logo on the north end of the main hall. The various rooms are all as bare of adornments as the main hall, but offer more comfort than the wooden pews. Conference rooms have large oak tables surrounded with padded chairs. Icons use the medieval motif as well (Fenris is a large mastiff, Blaster is a crossbow wielded by a squire, etc.).

## The Compound

YYY's offices are right now just a lot more well-protected than a company this small ought to be. The compound is located just east of Night City - about 2 minutes by car outside the Map on page 198 in the rulebook.

The compound has a small security office, which is staffed 24 hours a day by at least two guards. The guards are well-paid, attentive, and professional. They monitor the security computer system and cameras diligently. In the event a guard needs a snack from the Vend-O-Matic, his partner will remain behind — the office is always staffed. There are two more guards walking patrol around the perimeter of the office compound at all times. Once every hour, one of these guards will enter the office and check the interior, even when there are employees present. All guards are equipped with heavy autopistols and light body armor (equivalent to BodyTest Full Impact Roadrasher). Consider them to be average CorpSec (pg 241). They also have a universal key card, letting them move freely through the interior of the building. Around the neck of each guard, tucked under their armor, is a personalized "station key." Guards on patrol must use the key at four stations (shown on the map) on their patrol route to indicate that they have been by. If a guard fails to key in within the allotted time, the office is alerted by the computer. The system is set up so that each guard on patrol has to "key in" every 20 minutes, and hit the stations in the proper order. There is an armored Personnel Carrier with a CorpSec logo parked just outside the security office. It has a turreted machine cannon. Ouch.

Kisada's computer system is an island in the net — you can't hack into it from the outside. The only way to access the information the players need is from the office itself; either inside the computer room of the offices, from Kisada's desk, or (if they're clever enough) by tapping into the fiberoptic LAN connection on the roof (electronics, Kitbash, Hayduking or Commo roll of 10). Luckily for the players, there are no cameras watching the roof.

The compound is surrounded by a 3m tall brick wall, which is covered in clinging vines. The vines, while decorative, also serve to hide the alarm system's sensor mesh. Should anyone so much as lean on the wall, the company's security system will pinpoint their location and bring it to the security office's attention. The security office will monitor that spot closely to see if any mischief is afoot. Anyone unwise enough to climb the wall without defeating the sensor mesh will undoubtedly be met on the other side by a pair of guards, as they are always in radio contact with the office and each other. Fortunately for the players, the sensor mesh is not top-of-the-line anymore. It can be defeated in ten minutes with a Tech roll of 15 (Hayduking or Suburban Ninja of 10), provided that the character performing the task has tools and wire on hand. This will render a 3m section of mesh inoperative and safe to cross.

The compound is also protected by multispectral video cameras which are perched on the top of the main building. There are six cameras; their location and field of view is indicated on the map. The cameras feed video straight to the security office, and are equipped with passive infrared imaging as well as visible light capability. The bottom line is that they can easily see the heat from an intruder's body even in utter darkness. They can even see the residual heat left behind by footprints for several minutes. The cameras pan quickly back and forth; it will be impossible to sneak by them as long as they are operational. It is possible to shoot them out, but that will of course raise the alarms.

A netrunning character (or Rache, if absolutely necessary) could "speed" the system and substitute a video loop for the live feed. See the Computer System for YYY, below. Once the wizard has located the right subsystem, it'll take an Information Systems roll of at least 21 (or Suburban ninja at 15) to get the loop in place. Even then, it'll only go unnoticed by the guard at the monitors for 2d10+5 minutes. A final option is to white out the cameras by introducing a strong heat source, like a thermite charge, into their field of view. This is effective but would draw a lot of attention. It's got to be really hot to white out the cameras — a Molotov cocktail wouldn't do it. Again, Hayduking players could cause major problems in the camera systems, the more creative the better.

The interior of the compound has cameras in



## Evolve or Die!

the hallways and in the high-security labs. These cameras operate just like the ones outdoors, and can be defeated the same ways. A player will have an additional +1 difficulty for each camera that is being worked around. While they are inside, the players will have to avoid or incapacitate the guards, but should avoid armed conflict. The guards are much more heavily armed and have nearly infinite backup; YYY has an Emergency Contract with CorpSec to provide 50 armed security in under 10 minutes if the situation warrants, and any firefight inside the compound ground will trigger this response. However, as you will see in Part Two, this may be to the players' advantage, since the CorpSec team that arrives will be loyal to Arasaka. Any Scanners in the group should be able to track the guards' movements and keep the players one step ahead of the guards.

If the players take out a guard, they can use his key card to get around inside, but this could alert the guard at the security office due to the unusual movement pattern. If the players move around without a key card, they will need to defeat each electronic lock through a "friend" inside the computer systems [see the Datafort diagram], with electronics work at each door (Use Thief Stuff or Suburban Ninja: 2 minutes at a difficulty 10 for most, 5 minutes and diff = 20 for high security areas), or by brute force (the doors and walls have SDP = 15, and will certainly set off the alarms if blown through).

If the guards are alerted to the presence of the PCs, one patrol guard and one of the office guards will come to investigate. They have been ordered to restrain intruders if possible but to shoot to kill if necessary, and will perform their duties with enthusiasm. If in the evaluation of the guard in the security office they need reinforcements (armed resistance, or a team of greater than five people), then he'll call in CorpSec.

The security office itself looks like the little bunkers that gas station attendants work in. It's in the heart of the building, and has a physical lock on the door; wizards and electronics won't help. You can use brute force, a lockpick, or a dextrous tinman could use tendrils to open the lock at a difficulty of 20, or an alchemist could realign the tumblers to "open" at a difficulty of 20. However, the guard on the inside has a weapons cache and body armor available. If he doesn't want to come out, he's nigh invulnerable.

Kisada's office likewise has a different security system from the rest of the lab — a retina scan and number code are needed to get past Kisada's door. If a netrunner is present, the Retina scan can be overcome, but for some reason the numberpad can't be touched from the computer system. The truth is, the numberpad is on

the "fritz"; Kisada has put in requests to have it fixed for about 3 weeks, but YYY's repair team has been dragging its heels. Kisada has been doing all of his work out of the computer room and lab, which is where the backup of the test reports can be found.

ArcoRunners could track out the tunnel system that runs underneath the YYY office; this will lead to a Janitorial closet inside offices. The group should also try to negotiate with the local Troggs (from the *Bastille Day* supplement) — they've got all of the alarms in those tunnels shut down, but would be unhappy if someone were to walk around down there without "askin' real nice."

It is possible to create a diversion which will draw the CorpSec to one end of the compound and then direct the "assault" on the other. Use your judgement on what would draw the CorpSec's attention, but keep in mind that they are very suspicious right now (they have been told that possible terrorist activity is possible) and will tend to check out just about anything unusual.

## The Roof

If the players get a schematic of the computer systems at YYY, they will get a tech (Hayduking, Kitbash, Commo, or Schoolin') roll at a 10 to



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## How to use Jack outside of Cybergeneration

"...And Jack Left Town" can be used in any of the Cyberpunk RPGs (Cyberpunk, GURPS Cyberpunk and Shadowrun) on the market with a little extra work. Keep in mind that players of other systems may not have as much practice at working around problems as CyberGen players (instead being used to relying on superior firepower). You may need to make the superior firepower of the security very obvious (increase it if necessary).

The T112 program is going to have to change a bit; it could, for instance, be a brand new nasty tracing program that will track a hacker back to his deck in half the time of current tracers. The Players will be hired by an semi-mythical net figure to do the run. Use an appropriate dollar figure to get the players interested (unlike Cybergeneration, these other systems rarely have altruism as a motivator).

For Shadowrun, you will need to add some magical flavor including a mage security guard. Have several of the CorpSec be Orcs, Trolls and Dwarves. Instead of software, T112 could be a biological virus that attacks and kills a certain type of Metahuman (all Orcs, for example).



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notice that the LAN of the internal system has a connection on the roof. Players who reach the roof will notice immediately that all of the sensors and other security hardware point away from the building, and that they can work in relative peace unless the alarm has already been raised. In the center of the roof is the fiberoptic line that connects with the internal computer system. It will require one of the following to connect a player's V-Term to the line (a Data Tap or, Commo 10, Hayduking 20, Electronics 10, Tech 15, Schoolin' 20, Kitbash 15). If they make the connection, the results in the "Main Computer Room" section happen to them on the roof.

## Kisada's Office

If the players actually get in here, they shouldn't have too hard a time telling that it hasn't been used in a while. It reeks. Kisada left the remains of his lunch in the wastebasket when he was last able to get in the office, and by now the mildew smell is overpowering. There's really nothing in here — all the data they need is in the main computer room, where Kisada has been working.

## The Main Computer Room

There are two mainframes in this large, refrigerated room. As they enter, the larger of the two is across from the players, but the one they want is to their right (east end of the room). The primary mainframe has a single terminal and makes up the core system represented by the datafort.


Kisada's computer is what the players care about: it has a nice little display showing the message "Welcome Dr. Kisada." There is a convenient little slot beneath the display for Rache's smartcard. If someone decides to hack into the system

(everything they need is right in front of them, and security is a joke for this system — the guards are supposed to keep everyone from ever touching it), they can easily glance across all of the experimental results. Honestly, though, who cares? It's mostly going to mean nothing to these kids.

As soon as they jack the smartcard in, there will be about 10 seconds of strange flashing lights from the display before the Wrath of Rache destroys the system. If a wizard is inside of Kisada's system during this, it should be a mind-blowing experience; give him or her a REF roll at a 15 to get out of the system in time not to be mind-wiped along with the computer system. Rache's smartcard pops out of the console with all the data.

When Kisada's system comes crashing to the ground, its dying effort is to flip an alert switch in the security office. Regardless of how careful they have been up to now, CorpSec knows they're here, and things are about to get sticky. The players hear the voice of one of the CorpSec agents coming over the loudspeaker:

"Dr. Kisada? Is that you? Dr. Kisada? Something's wrong with your system, Doctor. I'm sending some of my men over." This is the best place to end a session.

Bring the kids back for next issue as they try to get the pretty card back to the Rock & Taco. 







GAME  
MASTER'S  
WORKSHOP

# The Good,

Artwork by Intern Jan © 1996  
Written by Larry Granato © 1996



## Rogar the Paladin

**Occupation:** Do-gooder

**Skills:** Chivalry, Speechifying

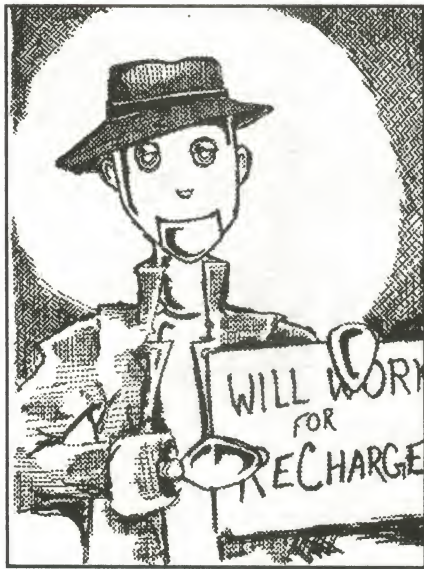
**Motivation:** Self-promotion

**Weaknesses:** Crashing Bore, Excessive Caution

Rogar is the younger son of a minor noble who was barely able to qualify for admittance to an order of virtuous warriors. After an inauspicious period as a squire, he gathered together a group of like-minded lackeys, and set forth to right wrongs, rescue princesses, etc.

Being a prudent individual, Rogar decided to take his crusade against evil in small doses, rather than undertaking any long and hazardous adventures in unexplored regions. Thus he and his group are usually found in areas where there is little danger. After each foray against local malefactors, he makes an extended tour of the region, haranguing the population on his latest heroic exploits. Although Rogar is not a liar, he has a poor memory and tends to exaggerate (he flunked humility). Still, he's clever enough to quickly involve himself in mopping-up operations after some major evil has been defeated by others, and his publicity campaigns afterwards usually ensure that he gets most of the credit by default.

Rogar spends a good deal of time raising funds, part of which are used to equip himself and his men with the finest gear available. The rest is dispensed as alms by the several religious-type followers he employs. He is willing to aid others, provided the danger is not too extreme, but he spends most of the adventure delivering morality lectures. ☞



## BY-BE ("Bobby")

**Occupation:** Domestic Robot

**Skills:** Conversation, Driving, Cleaning

**Motivation:** Search for owner

**Weaknesses:** Sheltered existence; unfamiliar with society

BY-BE is a servant-type mechanical that was produced with a manufacturing defect which allowed it a much greater degree of self-awareness than is normally the case. This condition was magnified by its original owners, who added various enhancements and treated him like a member of the family. However, tight economic conditions forced them to sell Bobby some years later to an small industrial concern and move to another system.

The factory had no need for a domestic model and Bobby was placed on the assembly line along with other, much less intelligent robots. Bored and restless, Bobby rationalized that he had not really been sold to the factory as he had not witnessed the transaction, and simply left one afternoon.

Unfortunately, shortly after that, Bobby accidentally knocked down a starport policeman, an action which witnesses called deliberate. He was placed on a list of dangerously malfunctioning robots that were to be destroyed on sight. Since that time he's been on the run, trading his skills for recharges and transport. He spins plausible stories about being a courier, or being on a private errand for his master. He will travel with others as long as they are heading in the general direction of his family. Since there are many other robots of his type, and he has altered his ID numbers, there is only a small chance that he will be spotted by the police. ☞



## Lord Allistair Chumley

**Occupation:** Diplomat

**Skills:** Persuasion, Court skills, Perception

**Motivation:** Serve the ruler

**Weaknesses:** Snobbish, Fastidious

Lord Chumley is a middle-ranking nobleman who has made a name for himself as a traveler and envoy. His innocuous appearance and stuffy behavior hide a clever and discerning mind. Although he constantly makes protestations about the lack of high class accommodations and coarse company he must endure in his travels, he is actually making keen observations about the people he meets and the places he visits.

The gloomy Chumley estates had fallen into decline long before his Lordship's birth, so he decided to pursue a career in government while still a young man. After an education befitting a gentlemen, Chumley served in the military. He then moved into the bureaucracy where he served in several minor posts until coming to the attention of the current ruler. He has been employed in increasingly important posts, negotiating and gathering intelligence on neighboring countries and persons of interest. ☞

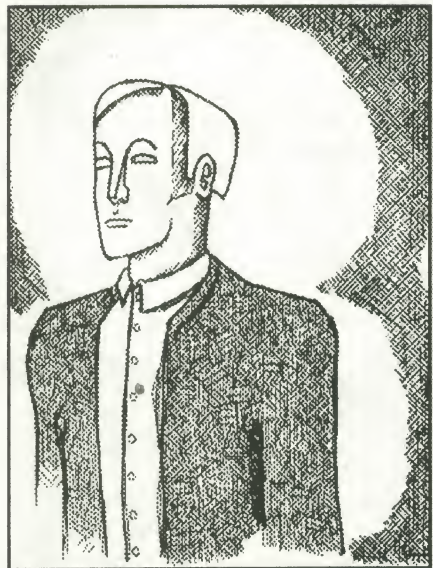




## GAME MASTER'S WORKSHOP

# The Bad,

Artwork by Intern Jen © 1996  
Written by Larry Granato © 1996



### Arvan

**Occupation:** Android Assistant  
**Skills:** Business, Cultures, Mathematics  
**Motivation:** Self-preservation  
**Weaknesses:** Unstable cyberbrain

Arvan will be first met when his current owner tries to sell him to anyone he can find, at a bargain price. A check will reveal the android is in perfect condition and the ownership documents are in order. Arvan is humanoid in form, but is a bright blue, with stylized features. Unlike more advanced biosynthetic replicants, he is obviously cybernetic. Unfortunately Arvan suffers from a hidden condition, which, under certain stressful circumstances (GM's choice), causes him to become unstable and commit crimes, including murder. Arvan does not go berserk when this happens, but acts in a very calculating and deliberate way.

He will not harm his master but tries to frame other members of the party. Under normal circumstances, Arvan will "subconsciously" undertake activities to assist in his crimes, without disobeying direct orders. For example he might disable, hide, dispose of character's weapons or equipment, plant false evidence, alter or forge documents and records. 🎲



### "Fast Eddie"

**Occupation:** Salesman  
**Skills:** Persuasion, Lying  
**Motivation:** Selling  
**Weaknesses:** Single-minded

Fast Eddie, as he is known, owns the largest used spaceship lot in the sector. He (or maybe she) is a tall, knobby alien with a variety of odd looking appendages. Hailing from a backward, little known world, his species is known for their penchant for merchandising. Striking a bargain with a free trader enabled him to leave home and start his own business.

Fast Eddie's loud and annoying holocommercials seem to be constantly displayed just about everywhere on the planet. They advertise "slightly used" ships of every kind, including "top-line fighters, torpedo boats, corvettes and more!" Visitors to his lot will find something else, however. It looks more like a scrap yard. The military ships are all stripped hulks or quite obsolete. Fast Eddie and his salescreatures will quickly steer the buyers towards various grimy merchant vessels and gaudy yachts, all in somewhat questionable condition. Fast Eddie is determined to sell his customers something — anything, if necessary. He tends to become hysterical and difficult to understand if a buyer leaves without making a purchase. Everything is overpriced, but he will bargain down much lower if necessary. Whether a customer is getting a deal even at the lower prices is hard to know. 🎲



### Mediocrates

**Occupation:** Sage  
**Skills:** Languages, Oratory, History  
**Motivation:** Likes to hear self talk  
**Weaknesses:** Shallow knowledge, Exaggeration

Mediocrates is a second-rate scholar who acts as an informal advisor to all and sundry. Unlike most savants, he is not associated with a school or library, but works near the marketplace dispensing cut-rate advice. He claims to be an expert in any area a person might mention.

Mediocrates came from a lower class family that hoped he could advance himself by getting an education. As a student, Mediocrates was easily distracted by social activities, and was thrown out of one school after another due to his poor performance. Eventually, he amassed a store of knowledge that was wide if not deep. He is involved in any number of activities, from selling maps of dubious accuracy, to giving lessons in oratory. He is especially quick to zero in on newcomers and appraise them of his "special rate" for first-time customers. 🎲

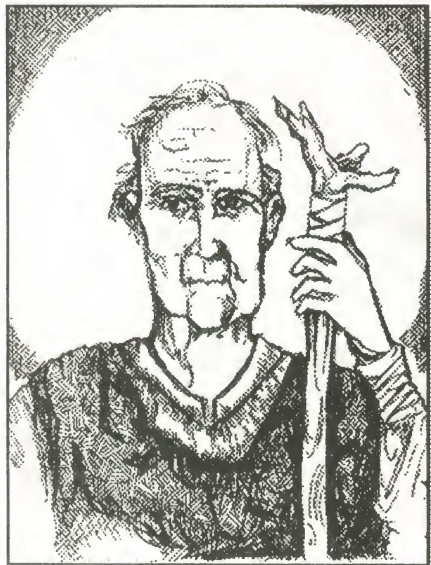




## GAME MASTER'S WORKSHOP

# And The Ugly

Artwork by Intern Jen © 1996  
Written by Larry Granato © 1996



### Gums

**Occupation:** Guide

**Skills:** Tracking, Hunting, Wilderness

**Motivation:** Enjoyment of nature, fees earned

**Weaknesses:** Slow, toothless

Gums is the most experienced guide in the border region. He has led numerous expeditions to monster's lairs and the suspected sites of magic and treasure. He is considered the authority on the area. Although his mental and physical speed has slowed with age, he is invariably right about the habits and probable actions of wilderness creatures. He never gets lost.

Gums has no compunctions about leading others into danger if that is what they want. However, he is not a combatant, but uses his concealment skills to avoid or escape conflict. He has a sixth sense that informs him when combat is imminent, and he slips away, returning after the battle is over.

Every time Gums says something, he begins with a mumbling, smacking noise from his toothless mouth as he gathers his thoughts. ☞



### Raglak

**Occupation:** Gangster

**Skills:** Plotting, Stealing

**Motivation:** Make Money

**Weaknesses:** Inflexibility, Greed

Raglak, a human, is a local of poor reputation who is always found in the company of ne'er-do-wells. Although it is difficult to pin any particular misdeed on him, he is believed to be behind much of the criminal activity in the district.

Raglak, born to a destitute peasant family, was determined to better himself. He left the farm for town, where his natural abilities made him a rising star in the thieves guild. Frustrated by guild restrictions, he left and formed a competing organization. Raglak's bunch, as they are known, include half-orcs, muggers, burglars, hit men, pickpockets, bandits, and various assorted thugs and con artists. In town, the group generally keeps a low profile to avoid trouble with the law, but are quick to pick on newcomers who appear to be easy marks.

They are happy to perform dirty deeds for the right price—beating people up is their favorite pastime.

Raglak does not maintain a fixed headquarters but travels about the area, staying in the houses of friends in town and the countryside, planning his next scheme. He does not personally participate in most of these activities. He also has several good hide-outs. His followers are often sent to scavenge on the trails of treasure-hunters, hoping to pick up dropped or hidden loot, or overcome weakened parties. ☞



### Whaid-el-Bazaar

**Occupation:** Spy

**Skills:** Listening, Hiding, Sneaking, Disguise

**Motivation:** Money, Information

**Weaknesses:** Cowardly, Low combat ability

Whaid-el-Bazaar is a mysterious person who deals in information, rumors and blackmail. It is said that if anyone can find out something that is hidden, it is he. His background is unknown, but he has been associated with beggars, thieves and assassins for many years. Yet he also has contact with the likes of merchants, officials, and princes as well.

One can always hear rumors about the appearance and suspected location of Whaid. These rumors vary widely, and it is suspected that he spreads them himself. Requests for his services will eventually reach his ears through his network of informers.

He arranges his meetings so that he has several pre-planned escape routes, complete with obstacles, traps, and other methods of delaying pursuers. He never directly confronts his customers, preferring to talk through curtains, doors, screens, speaking tubes, or through messengers. Payments must be always be made up front. ☞



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# What is *Lights, Camera, Action?*

Long-time SHADIS readers will recognize this feature immediately. Need an off-the-cuff storyline for your RPG campaign? Match the party's current situation to the one described in "Lights," then switch on the "Camera" and drag them into the "Action!"

Not only is this feature back after a short hiatus, but it will also continue regularly — some readers became quite passionate about it! We encourage that, and would love to see your scenarios. Send them in; there's a good chance they'll be used.

## Dead From the Hills

**Lights:** The party is about to embark upon a journey across some mountains and into a vast desert. There's a small town in the foothills of the mountains, and so the party decides to stop there to stock up on supplies. Unfortunately, the town is deserted. Signs of struggle are everywhere, but there are no bodies. The party discovers the local cleric, an old man who's mind has been broken. All he is capable of saying is, "The dead... the dead! The dead came from the hills and took them away!"

**Camera:** In the hills just beyond the town is a series of tunnels that run deep under the mountains. These are abandoned Ork tunnels that have been occupied by hundreds of dead men and women, walking in a near-mindless trance. They can smell living flesh, however, and attempt to devour it whenever they can. As the party crawls deeper into the hills, they discover living men wearing charms that allow them to command the Dead. The tunnels dip even deeper into the earth, and as they do, the party begins to suspect that these walking Dead may even be the villagers that once lived in the small town at the foot of the hills.

**Action:** The masterminds behind this plot are a Necromancer and a Vampire. The Vampire came to the Necromancer, telling him of a legendary artifact called the Dathuduri Stone. This stone allows the wielder to drain the life energies from hapless victims, thus giving life to the wielder, making him quite immortal. It also turns the victims into those mindless, flesh-devouring zombies the party has been hacking into bits. There is a problem between the two masterminds, however, because the Vampire wants the stone to restore his humanity. He is not sure if the stone can do this, but he is willing to try anything to regain his humanity, even if it means helping the party defeat the Necromancer.

— John Wick

## NDE

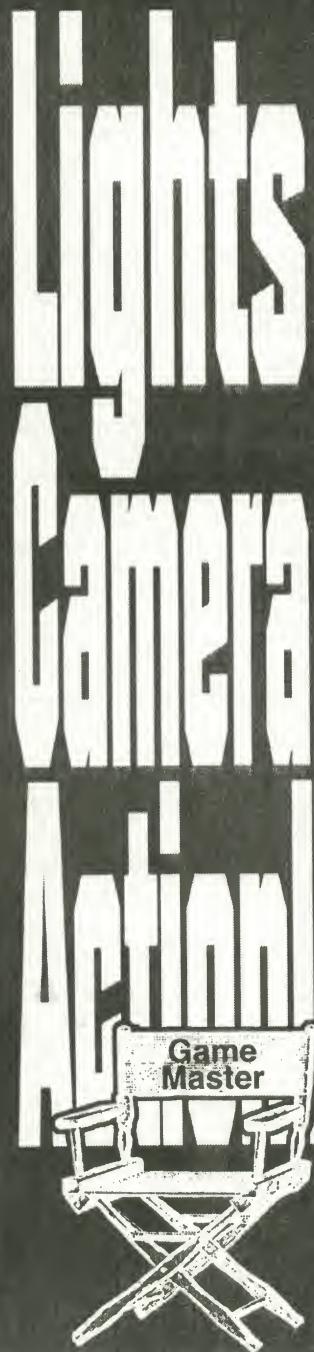
**Lights:** This scenario is best suited to a mod-

ern-day horror RPG. To work, it requires that one of the PCs or main NPCs become deeply unconscious or have a near-death experience — this can occur due to a heart attack, gunshot wound, blow to the head, or any other serious injury a busy investigator might acquire. A bout of temporary insanity or a drug overdose could even be enough to set up the scenario. It is best to let this traumatic even to occur naturally during the course of the game — don't force such a dramatic scene to happen before its time.

**Camera:** Twenty years ago, a serial killer was tracked down and killed by the FBI. Sam Bennet was shot to death in, coincidentally, the same place the unlucky character was hurt. Bennet's spirit, not resting easy, was able to take advantage of the PC's weakened condition to insinuate himself into the body. Over the next few weeks, Bennet will become stronger and stronger, and will eventually totally submerge the hapless PC's personality. Aspects of Bennet's personality will be evident sooner, but the PC's friends won't notice anything amiss — at first. Some different clothes, some old music... it all seems harmless enough.

**Action:** Bennet still feels he has work to do — namely, a lot of killing. He intends to deal with the FBI agents responsible for his death as well as their families, but will not pass up targets of opportunity. Bennet is able to take control of the PC during times of weakness, such as during sleep. While he is in control, he has access to all the PC's knowledge and skills. He will do his best to get some work done covertly, but after waking up in a field by a shallow grave a couple of times the PC will quickly realize there is a problem. If help isn't found quickly, the PC will become Bennet. Then, they will live the nightmare of Bennet's sick killing spree — perhaps being shot again, or driven mad if the other PCs don't help in time. If the PC's friends get suspicious and spend some time in the library conducting research, they will get enough clues to get them going. Once the party learns the truth, Bennet's spirit can be exorcised in many ways, but they should all be gruesome, expensive, and dangerous.

— Matt Starosick





## Close Encounters of the Random Kind

# Scenario Creation System

by Matt Stevens

Sixty years ago, most fantasy and science fiction authors in the United States wrote for cheap publications known as the pulp magazines. Most of the 'pulp' paid a cent a word or less, and it was difficult for a pulp writer to make a living unless he produced dozens of short stories or novelettes every year, an enormous amount of material.

Typing all of these stories was hard enough. It was even more difficult to come up with effective, original story lines. In desperation, many pulp authors turned to *plot formulas* for their ideas. These plot formulas — systematic, abstract outlines of a wide variety of story lines — were often quite helpful. Many high-quality stories were constructed with plot formulas, and they were used by such talented writers as Lester Dent, the primary author of the *Doc Savage* novels.

GMs are expected to produce as many "stories," in the form of game scenarios, as pulp authors were (and unlike pulp authors, they aren't paid for their troubles), but there are few serious counterparts to the "plot formulas" of the pulp novels that are specifically designed for role-playing games. The following "Scenario Creation System" is an attempt to fill that gap. It's designed to provide skeletal frames for scenarios, to complement the GM's imagination, to provide him with ideas during a creative slump.

The system is not genre-specific, so GMs will have to provide details that are appropriate to their campaign worlds. He will have to draw his own maps and floor plans, design his own patrons and villains, and flesh out the scenario in much more detail than I could possibly provide in a

seven or eight page article. Read future installments of CERK for additional guidance in scenario design.

### Setup

Before a GM can use this system, he has to specify what kinds of people the player characters will associate with. There are 2 kinds of NPCs, from the standpoint of this system:

1. **Patrons** are potential allies or employers of the PCs. Patrons can be victims of **disasters** or sources of **rumors**, but they can also make **solicitations** on the player characters.

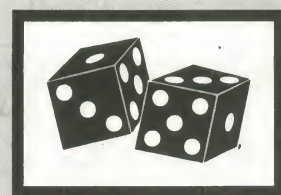
2. **Villains** can launch **attacks** against the player characters, they will be responsible for most **disasters**, and they can serve as the opponents of the PCs in those **solicited missions** that they accept.

The GM should construct lists or tables for each of these groups, with entries which are appropriate for his own particular campaign.

Then, the GM should determine the **settings** which are available in the game world. A list of such settings, again, would have to be provided by the game-master to suit his or her own campaign.

Once the GM has determined the type of NPCs which the player characters may encounter, and the type of settings which they may travel through, he is ready to use the Scenario Creation System. Follow each of the listed steps, as described in detail below.

### Step 1: Determine Player Character motivations.



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ソはつに つに な	2, 12
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TAKES A JUMP	4, 10
THEY ARE THE 1ST	5, 9
Ετο σλοβοδαν τεχ	6, 8
Lorem ipsum dolor	7



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6, 8	Φλιπ ψοιν. Ηεαδσ: πραππεδ οθτ. Ταιλ ρον ο
7	Ursus in tabernam introiit et cerevisiam imperavit. Tabernarius dixit, "Domine! Ursus in tabernam est et cerevisiam desiderat!" Dixit

Motivations are the most common reasons why characters do things. Read the following list, and select a motivation which is shared by most, if not all, of the player characters.

- 1. Duty.** The character's employer orders him to do things. The PC must obey if he wants to keep his position.
- 2. Greed.** The PC does things for the money.
- 3. Sympathy.** The PC often comes to the aid of other people out of concern for their welfare or a sense of *noblesse oblige*.
- 4. Renown.** The PC often pursues activities to win fame, honor, and a good reputation.
- 5. Whimsy.** The PC often pursues activities when they seem like exciting or interesting things to do.
- 6. Love.** The PC pursues activities for the benefit of friends, lovers or family members.
- 7. Survival.** The PC is interested in saving himself.
- 8. Revenge.** The PC hates an enemy, and he will pursue an activity to kill him or make his life difficult.

## Step 2: Determine hooks.

There are four main types of hooks. These are listed below.

- 1. Solicitation.** Someone asks, orders or hires the player-characters to do something.
- 2. Attack.** Someone decides to make life miserable for the player-characters, by following, assassinating, or kidnapping them, or doing something else to the characters or to their friends or loved ones.
- 3. Disaster.** The PCs stumble into a situation in which innocent people are in danger, either from natural or man-made disasters, or from direct attacks by a villain.
- 4. Rumor.** The player-characters discover or are informed of useful information.

The types of hooks which you use depend upon the motivations of the player characters. Roll 1d10, add 1 if the PCs are often pursued by a single enemy, and check Table I below.

## Step 3: Describe Situations.

Once you have selected the **hook**, go to one of the following sections (depending on the type of hook which was rolled) to determine the exact situation which the player characters will face.

### A. Solicitations.

First, choose a *patron*, who will ask the PCs to do something. Then roll for the *mission type*, the activity which the characters are asked to perform. Roll 1d20, add 2 if the PCs are motivated by Sympathy, Renown or Love, subtract 2 if they are motivated by Greed, Survival or Revenge, and then check the table below.

**1-2: Kill or capture.** The PCs may be asked to assassinate an important figure, capture a criminal, or hunt down a dangerous or valuable monster.

**3-4: Steal goods.** These goods could be acquired through a raid against enemies (human or monster), through grave robbery, or through a search for hidden treasure or shipwreck.

**5-7: Spy.** The PCs may be asked to infiltrate an organization, or stake out a person's home, and report on their activities.

**8: Investigate.** The PCs may be asked to confirm a rumor or serve as an eyewitness to an important event.

**9-11: Solve crimes.** A crime has been committed, and the PCs may be asked to find out who is responsible for it, possibly by the person currently accused.

Table I: Hooks

Motivation	Hooks			
	Solicitation	Disaster	Rumor	Attack
Duty	1-7	8	9	10
Greed	1-5	6	7-9	10
Sympathy	1-4	5-8	9	10
Renown	1-2	3-6	7-9	10
Whimsy	1-2	3-4	5-9	10
Love	1-2	3-6	7	8-10
Survival	1	2-4	5	6-10
Revenge	1-2	3	4-7	8-10



## the Random Kind

**12-13: Locate persons.** Someone is missing, and the PCs may be asked to find him.

**14-15: Protect/escort.** The patron, or a dependent of the patron, may expect to be attacked by a villain; or he may be traveling through dangerous terrain, and be looking for guidance or protection from anticipated hazards.

**16: Diplomacy.** The characters may be asked to send a message, or to mediate between feuding parties for a peace mission.

**17-18: Rescue.** The PCs may have to rescue someone from kidnappers. Or if the victim has been arrested, the PCs may have to break into the dungeon (or wherever) to save him. Or the PCs may have to save someone from a natural disaster.

**19-20: Sabotage/deactivate.** A villain's plan to kill many innocent people needs to be foiled. In most cases, a powerful tool, weapon or explosive device of an enemy needs to be destroyed.

Then roll for **complications**, valuable information that the patron will not tell the player-character, either out of ignorance, carelessness or malice. Roll 1d3-1 for the number of complications, and then roll 1d20 or choose from the below list for each of them.

**1:** Patron deceives the player-characters about his identity.

**2-3:** Patron deceives them about his motives or goals; they are far less ethical than was originally supposed.

**4:** The patron's enemies have been tipped off.

**5:** The patron is killed, captured, or otherwise silenced.

**6-7:** The patron will find a way to avoid paying

or otherwise rewarding the player characters.

**8-9:** The player-characters will encounter more opposition than they were told.

**10:** The target of the mission is not who he appears to be.

**11-20:** There are certain mysteries that will have to be solved for the mission to be successfully completed. The patron probably does not know the answers to these mysteries (unless another complication would lead one to believe that he does). The type of mystery depends on the type of mission and (in some cases) the roll of a d6:

### Kill/capture:

**1-4:** The identity of the person to be killed or captured is unknown;

**5-6:** The location of the person to be killed or captured is unknown.

**Rescue:** The location of the person to be rescued is unknown

**Find/Steal:** The location of the item to be stolen is unknown

**Protection:** The identity of the person who threatens the patron is unknown

### Deactivation:

**1-3:** The location of the enemy's attack needs to be identified

**4:** The timing of the attack needs to be specified

**5-6:** The techniques for disarming the enemy's trap are unknown

Finally, choose a villain for the opposition that the character faces if he takes on the mission.

## B. Disasters.

Roll 1d8, and subtract 1 if the PCs are very high-powered (GM's discretion), and check the

**Table II: Disasters**

### Terrain Type

	Plains	Desert	Mountains	Seacoast	Forest	Other
1	Earthquake	Earthquake	Earthquake	Earthquake	Earthquake	Earthquake
2	Earthquake	Flood	Avalanche	Earthquake	Forest Fire	Flood
3	Tornado	Storm	Avalanche	Tsunami	Forest Fire	Volcano
4	Tornado	Sandstorm	Volcano	Storm	Forest Fire	Other
5-6	Storm	Sandstorm	Storm	Storm	Storm	Storm

"Storms," in this table, can refer to hurricanes, blizzards, hail storms or any other form of precipitation which threatens lives or property.

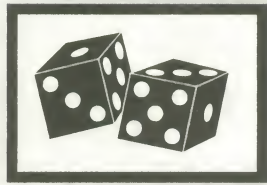


ソはつに つにな	2, 12
PHIS IS NIMM XE TMT	3, 11
TAB B A JME TMT	4, 10
PHIS IS NIMM XE TMT	5, 9
Ετο σλοβοδαν τεχ	6, 8
Lorem ipsum dolor	7



2, 12	ソはつに つにな
3, 11	PHIS IS NIMM XE TMT
4, 10	TAB B A JME TMT
5, 9	PHIS IS NIMM XE TMT
6, 8	Ετο σλοβοδαν τεχ
7	>Lorem ipsum dolor





below table; or choose from the below list to determine the type of disaster which is threatening innocent people.

**1: Natural disaster.** Cross reference a D6 roll with the terrain type that the PCs are traveling through, and check Table II below.

**2-4: A genre-specific man-made disaster** occurs. The type of disaster depends upon the tech level of the world: *Low-tech* (1850 U.S. or earlier) or *High-tech* (1850 U.S. or later). If the campaign is set on a *low-tech* world, roll 1d8:

- 1-2: A plague breaks out
- 3: Someone is possessed by a malignant spirit
- 4-6: A monster or a wild animal goes on a violent rampage
- 7-8: Roll 1d6 on the sub-table for high-tech worlds, below.

If the campaign is set on a *high-tech* world, roll 1d8:

- 1-2: A vehicle capsizes, or crashes, or is about to crash
- 3-5: A fire or some kind of industrial accident threatens innocent lives
- 6: People are in danger of falling to their deaths, out of a building, in an elevator, or off of a bridge
- 7-8: Roll on the sub-table for low-tech worlds, above.

**5-8: Violent crime against innocents.** First, roll 1d6 and check the table below for the type of crime committed:

- 1: Assassination
- 2: Bombing or Arson
- 3-4: Robbery
- 5: Assault or rape
- 6: Hijacking or Hostage Taking

Then select the villain who was responsible for the disaster. Finally, if the PCs manage to save innocent lives, roll 1d8, and check the table below.

- 1-2: No immediate consequences.
- 3-4: The innocents include a patron of some importance, calling for a **solicitation** roll (see Section A).
- 5-8: The villain decides to take revenge on the player characters for foiling his plans, calling for an **attack** roll (see Section D).

Finally, if any player character has a dependent, roll 1d6; on a roll from 1 to 4, that dependent is one of the victims of the disaster.

### C. Rumors.

First, roll 3d6 to determine the type of informa-

tion the PCs are given. Add 2 to the result if the player-characters are motivated by revenge; subtract 2 if they are motivated by greed. Then check the table below, rolling additional dice as instructed.

**3-7: Reports of places which are filled with treasures;** roll 1D6 and check the below table for the location of the treasure:

- 1-3: Ruins or tombs
- 4-5: Crash sites or shipwrecks
- 6: Stash sites for thieves

**8: Reports of persons or places which may answer important secrets**

**9-10: Reports of weird sightings or events;** roll 3d6:

- 1-2: The sighting of strange monsters, beings, or of a person who is supposed to be dead
- 3: Bizarre, supernatural weather
- 4: Reports of hidden cities, palaces, islands, etc.
- 5-6: Mysterious deaths or disappearances; or the loss of contact with an outpost

**11-13: Reports of unsolved crimes;** roll 1D8 and check the table below for the type of crime committed:

- 1-3: Robberies of precious items
- 4-6: Murders
- 7: Kidnappings
- 8: Other crimes, probably violent

**14-18: Information about a villain.** First, select the villain. Then roll 1d10 and check the table below:

- 1-3: Information about his latest activities: travel plans, purchases, meetings with other villains, or other useful facts
- 4: Background information on his personal history
- 5: Relationships with enemies, allies or other associates
- 6: His motives or goals
- 7: An account of his powers and/or secret methods for facing them
- 8: His identity if previously anonymous
- 9: The location of his hideout, if previously unknown
- 10: Other information

Then, roll below for the source of the information. For unsolved crimes or information about an enemy, roll 1d10 and check the table below. For all other information, roll 1d6.

- 1-2: Innocent observer
- 3: Another investigator or informant

ソはつに つにな	2, 12
PHIS IS MYM RF TMT	3, 11
TØS K A JME TÆMT	4, 10
תצפת שניל סי סיה	5, 9
Ετο σλοβοδαν τεχ	6, 8
Lorem ipsum dolor	7

2, 12	ソはすとなせそた むせなとすぬ てちそれりなふす すせなそすらす むちせ
3, 11	PHIC F CRIT HIFMS THM FEB22 HEC CRFICM RMT FRT RT F
4, 10	8JN A 7OMØEAKIS TØ3 7A9TI ØAS 7A7730 TØ3 77 70Y Y9A
5, 9	תתחשבה ניוו א פיל ית דעפסארת כאח עדאס א ניש שועשה כלל ניו א פילל אחרתא כאח עדאס שועשה
6, 8	Φλιπ ποιν. Ηεαδς: πραππεδ οθτ. Ταυλ ρον ο
7	Ursus in tabernam introiit et cerevisiam imperavit. Tabernarius dixit, "Domine! Ursus in tabernam est et cerevisiam desiderat!" Dixit



## The Random Kind

- 4: Announcements through the public media
- 5-6: Information can be discovered through personal research
- 7: Pawn of enemy or opponent, someone who worked for him without understanding his goals
- 8: Major henchman or accomplice of opponent
- 9: Rival to enemy/opponent
- 10: The enemy tells the player-characters himself, perhaps through riddles or other deliberate "clues."

Finally, for each rumor roll 1d8. On a roll of 1, the information is misleading; on a roll of 2, it is completely false.

### D. Attacks.

Someone tries to make life difficult for the PCs. First, choose a villain, who attacks the PCs. Then, roll 1d20; or roll 1d12 if the PCs do not have any important dependents, and check the below table to determine the nature of the attack:

1: The characters are monitored and possibly followed.

2: The characters' reputations are attacked.

3: The enemy may steal something that is cherished by the PCs, or burglarize their homes or headquarters.

4-5: The villain asks the characters to visit him. Roll 1d10.

1-2: The villain tries to befriend the PCs.

3-4: The villain offers to hire the PCs, or asks them to join him as partners.

5-6: The villain tries to persuade the PCs that his cause is a just one, and their actions will do more harm than good.

7-8: The villain threatens the PCs or their dependents.

9-10: The villain challenges one of the PCs to a contest or duel.

6: The villain sends an agent to befriend the PCs. Roll 1d6.

1-2: The agent attempts to assassinate the PCs.

3-4: The agent gathers information about the PCs and sends it to his employer.

5-6: The agent feeds the PCs misleading information.

7: The enemy will send an anonymous threat to kidnap or kill the PC.

8-10: The enemy will try to kidnap the PCs, and possibly torture them for information (or for pure sadistic pleasure).

11-12: The enemy will try to assassinate the PCs.

13-17: The enemy will try to kidnap the PCs' dependents, possibly as part of a trap to capture them.

18-19: The enemy will try to assassinate the PCs' dependents.

20: The enemy may send an anonymous threat to kidnap or kill the PCs' dependents.

Alternatively, attacks may be selected by the GM according to the actions of the PCs in previous adventures (whether their behavior was reasonable or odious; and whether they were careful or careless) and depending on the personality and the capabilities of the enemies in previous adventures.

Finally, roll 3d6, subtract 3 if the PCs are low-powered or inexperienced (GM's discretion), and check the table below to determine the villain's motivation for attacking the PCs.

3-7: The PCs have some object, or know some information, which one or more villain(s) would like to acquire.

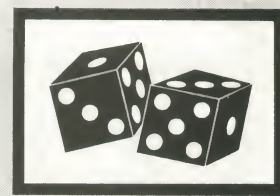
8: One of the PCs has powers or a position of which he is unaware, which makes him a threat to some villain(s), and a possible asset to others.

9: The villain sees crime as a sort of sport or game, and he sees the PCs as "worthy adversaries" for a violent contest.

10-11: The villain knows that the PCs wants to ruin him or destroy his plans, and he takes measures to stop them.

12-13: The PCs have already ruined the villain's life or plans, so the villain has decided to take revenge on them.

14-18: The villain wants to complete some master plan, but he expects the PC to try to stop him, so he wants to eliminate the PC.



ソはつに つに な	2, 1
HNIS 14 NIM XE TMT	3, 1
TBS B A JME TMT	4, 1
HO S NUL HXN	5,
Ετο σλοβοδαν τεχ	6,
Lorem ipsum dolor	



2, 12	ソはすとなせそた むせなとすぬ てちそれリなふす すせなそすらす むちせ
3, 11	FNIC F CRIH NIMW4 TMT FEE44 NE4 CREFCUM XMT FAT X1 F 1P
4, 10	8JN A 1OMB3ACK T03 7A9TI 0AS 7A9T00 T03 11 10Y Y9A
5, 9	שיל א ניוח א פיל תו דטפאדח סחא עתראם א נו נש טעשה סליא שילא א ניוח א פיל תו דטפאדח סחא עתראם
6, 8	Φλιπ ψοιν. Ηεαδς: γραππεδ οθτ. Ταυλ ρον ο
7	Ursus in tabernam introiit et cerevisiam imperavit. Tabernarius dixit, "Domine Ursus in tabernam est et cerevisiam desiderat!" Dixit





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# THE EDGE

NEWS, REVIEWS, AND MORE...

## CONTENTS

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*There's plenty more, too... computer product reviews start on page 90. And remember to find that rat!*

### NAVIGATING THE EDGE



Check it out!



Matt Staroscik was here.



Pay attention, there may be a quiz.



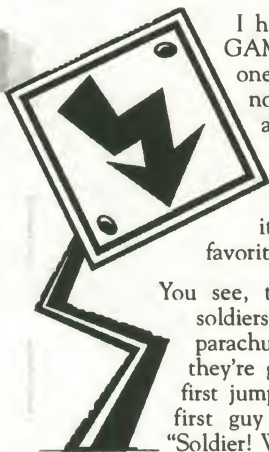
John Wick was here.



## THIS AND THAT



ZONE



I had the pleasure of attending the GAMA Trade Show again this year. It's one of my favorite shows because it's not as hectic as the consumer shows and you get to spend more time with the friends you only get to see a couple times a year. The show and the people who attend it kind of remind me of one of my favorite stories.

You see, there's these ten special forces soldiers in a plane. They've all got their parachutes strapped to their backs and they're getting ready to make their very first jump. The Sergeant walks up to the first guy and shouts right in his face: "Soldier! Why do you want to jump out of a perfectly good plane?" "Sergeant, I love the excitement!" is the reply. The sergeant keeps his grin to himself and moves on to the next soldier. "How 'bout you son? You like jumping out of planes?" "Sergeant, I love it, sergeant!" He works his way down the line asking the same question and getting the same answer ... until he gets to the last guy. This guy is a little smaller than the rest of them and obviously a little nervous, so the sergeant gets right up in the guys face and shouts: "You think jumping out of this plane is a good idea soldier?" "Sergeant, no sergeant! It scares the hell out of me!" The sergeant's surprise lights up his eyes and he asks, "Why the hell are you doing it, son?" "Because it's the only way I can hang out with guys who love to jump out of planes!"

Now, I love games. I enjoy playing them and watching the joy they bring when I publish them. Unfortunately, I am not one of the geniuses who make them. I'm not the math wizard who can build and balance a collectible card game or a writer/storyteller who can make playing in a role-playing world a magical experience. Yes, I own a game company, but the brains behind the product are the guys who work for me and who are sitting behind those booths at GAMA trying to sell that product. I'm the guy who jumps out of planes even though he's afraid because of the quality of people I get to be with. The people who bring you new game products in this industry are the finest people I have ever had the pleasure of spending time with and I look forward to jumping out of many planes with them in the future.

So, take a look to your right. This is the Origins Award Ballot. By spending 32 cents, you can show your appreciation for a game that has brought joy into your life. There are quite a few quality products listed, but to tell the truth, a couple of my favorites got left off this year, so I'll probably

be doing some write-ins. Even if your favorite wasn't listed, don't let that stop you from voting. *Shadis Magazine* came 3 votes away from winning last year, so believe me when I tell you that every vote counts! (As a side note, I was very surprised to learn that in the many years of the Origins awards, a write-in has never won, not even once. Also, in the ten years of publishing, Palladium Books has also never won a single award. Just in case you wanted to know.) So I urge you to vote, but I strongly urge you to get behind a product you and your friends love and send in a write-in. This award means a lot to a lot of people, and if you ever wanted a way to say "Thank you" to your favorite publisher or game designer, here's your chance.

JOHN ZINSER

## CONTEST WINNERS!

We'd like to announce the winners in our *Heresy Contest!*

**GRAND PRIZE**  
(Complete Set)  
Kathryn Woods

**RUNNERS UP**  
(12 Boosters each)

Joseph Francis  
Jason Hartley  
David Sousa

*Congratulations folks!*

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9. MICROSOFT
8. CHAOSIUM
7. OPTIMUS DESIGN SYSTEMS
6. METROPOLIS LTD.
5. KRAFT FOODS
4. SUN MICROSYSTEMS
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2. SUSAN VAN CAMP
1. R. TALSORIAN GAMES



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ACW 15mm ..... Stone Mountain Miniatures  
Biblical Wars 25mm ..... Wargames Foundry  
Celts 25mm ..... Mirilton  
Napoleons 15mm ..... Minifigs  
Napoleons 15mm ..... Vulcans Forge  
Write-In \_\_\_\_\_  
Mfr: \_\_\_\_\_

**2. Best Fantasy or Science Fiction Figure Series**

Angels & Archangels ..... RAFM  
Council of Wyrms ..... Ral Partha  
Daimyo 25mm ..... Reaper Miniatures  
Dark Heaven 25mm ..... Reaper Miniatures  
Legions of Steel ..... Global Games  
Necromunda ..... Games Workshop  
Slave Auction Ltd. Boxed Set ..... Ral Partha  
Star Wars ..... West End Games  
Stargrants 25mm ..... Geo-Hex/Ground Zero Games  
Warzone- Mutant Chronicles ..... Heartbreaker  
Write-In \_\_\_\_\_  
Mfr: \_\_\_\_\_

**3. Best Vehicular Series**

BattleTech: Vehicles & Mechs ..... Ral Partha  
Full Thrust Space Ships 25mm ..... Geo-Hex  
Micro Armor 1/285 ..... GHQ  
Star Wars Bantha ..... West End Games  
Warhammer 40K Vehicles ..... Games Workshop/Citadel  
Write-In \_\_\_\_\_  
Mfr: \_\_\_\_\_

**4. Best Miniatures Accessory Series**

American Civil War Buildings 15mm .....  
..... Stone Mountain Miniatures  
Colour Drop Paint System ..... Global Games  
Fantascenes Furnishings ..... Minifigs/Fantascenes  
Grendel Resin Kits ..... Heartbreaker  
Mountainscape Cave Sets ..... Geo-Hex  
Tiny Terrain SF 1/300 ..... Simtac  
Write-In \_\_\_\_\_  
Mfr: \_\_\_\_\_

**5. Best Miniatures Rules**

Command At Sea 2nd Edition ..... Clash of Arms  
Holes ..... Tri Tac Systems  
Supermarina I ..... Clash of Arms  
Valmy To Waterloo ..... Clash of Arms  
Volley and Bayonet ..... Game Designers Workshop  
Warzone ..... Heartbreaker  
Write-In \_\_\_\_\_  
Mfr: \_\_\_\_\_

**6. Best Game Accessory**

Armed and Dangerous, RoboRally .....  
..... Wizards of the Coast  
BattleTech Tech Readout 3058 ..... FASA Corp.  
Encyclopedia Magica V1-4 ..... TSR Inc.  
Homelands, Magic The Gathering .....  
..... Wizards of the Coast  
The INWO Book ..... Steve Jackson Games  
Mage: The Ascension Tarot Deck ..... White Wolf  
Netherworld, Shadowfist ..... Daedalus Games  
Reaper Life Counters Series ..... Reaper Miniatures  
Write-In \_\_\_\_\_  
Mfr: \_\_\_\_\_

**7. Best Role-Playing Rules**

Changeling: The Dreaming ..... White Wolf  
Cybergeneration 2nd Edition ..... R. Talsorian Games  
Everway ..... Wizards of the Coast  
Mage: The Ascension 2nd Edition ..... White Wolf  
Species ..... West End Games  
Write-In \_\_\_\_\_  
Mfr: \_\_\_\_\_

**8. Best Role-Playing Adventure**

Beyond the Wall, Pendragon ..... Chaosium  
Blades, Earthdawn ..... FASA Corp.  
Coming Full Circle, Call of Cthulhu ..... Pagan Publishing  
Giovanni Chronicle .....  
The Last Supper, Vampire ..... White Wolf  
Strange Aeons, Call of Cthulhu ..... Chaosium  
Write-In \_\_\_\_\_  
Mfr: \_\_\_\_\_

**9. Best Role-Playing Supplement**

Azlan, Shadowrun ..... FASA Corp.  
Birthright, AD&D ..... TSR Inc.  
Faeries, Snead & Link, Ars Magica .....  
..... Wizards of the Coast  
GURPS CthulhuPunk ..... Steve Jackson Games  
House of Hermes, Ars Magica ..... Wizards of the Coast  
Write-In \_\_\_\_\_  
Mfr: \_\_\_\_\_

**11. Best Pre-20th Century Boardgame**

April's Harvest ..... The Gamers  
Colonial Diplomacy ..... Avalon Hill  
Geronimo ..... Avalon Hill  
Marengo ..... The Gamers  
Stonewall in the Valley ..... Avalon Hill  
Three Days of Gettysburg ..... GMT  
Write-In \_\_\_\_\_  
Mfr: \_\_\_\_\_

**12. Best Modern-Day Boardgame**

Black Wednesday ..... The Gamers  
Empire of the Rising Sun ..... Avalon Hill  
Great War in the East ..... XTR  
Tunisia ..... The Gamers  
Yom Kippur ..... The Gamers  
Write-In \_\_\_\_\_  
Mfr: \_\_\_\_\_

**13. Best Fantasy or Science Fiction Boardgame**

Dragon Dice ..... TSR Inc.  
The Hobbit ..... Iron Crown Enterprises  
Iron Dragon ..... Mayfair  
Silent Death 2nd Edition ..... Iron Crown Enterprises  
Warhammer Quest ..... Games Workshop  
Write-In \_\_\_\_\_  
Mfr: \_\_\_\_\_

**15. Best Card Game**

The Great Daimut ..... Wizards of the Coast  
INWO Assassins ..... Steve Jackson Games  
Middle-earth: The Wizards ..... Iron Crown Enterprises  
Shadowfist ..... Daedalus Games  
The Last Crusade ..... Chameleon Eclectic  
Write-In \_\_\_\_\_  
Mfr: \_\_\_\_\_

**16. Best New Play-By-Mail Game**

Highlander, the Play By Mail ..... Claemor Entertainment  
Odyssey (Email) ..... Gamer's Den  
Riftlords ..... Flying Buffalo  
Swords of Pelam, Legends 2 ..... Midnight Games  
Toadal Chaos- The Frog Wars ..... Fractal Dimensions  
Write-In \_\_\_\_\_  
Mfr: \_\_\_\_\_

**17. Best Play-By-Mail Game**

Centurion ..... Fantasy Workshop  
CTF 2187 ..... Advanced Gaming Enterprises  
Illuminati ..... Flying Buffalo Inc.  
Middle-earth PBM- (1650/2950) ..... Game Systems Inc.  
Star Web ..... Flying Buffalo Inc.  
You're An Amoeba Go! ..... Monastic Software  
Write-In \_\_\_\_\_  
Mfr: \_\_\_\_\_

**18. Best Fantasy or SF Computer Game**

The 11th Hour ..... Virgin  
Descent ..... Interplay  
MechWarrior II ..... Activision  
Stone Keep ..... Interplay  
X-Corn II: UFO Defense ..... Microprose  
Write-In \_\_\_\_\_  
Mfr: \_\_\_\_\_

**19. Best Military or Strategy Computer Game**

Caesar II ..... Impressions  
Command & Conquer ..... Westwood  
Panzer General ..... SSI  
Sid Meier's Colonization ..... Microprose  
Steel Panthers ..... SSI  
Write-In \_\_\_\_\_  
Mfr: \_\_\_\_\_

**20. Best Game Related Fiction**

Encyclopedia Cthulhiana ..... Chaosium  
From Prussia With Love ..... R. Talsorian/Proteus  
House of the Sun, Shadowrun ..... FASA  
Made In Goatswood .....  
New Tales of Horror in the Severn Valley ..... Chaosium  
Shroud of Madness, Earthdawn ..... FASA  
Tactics of Duty, BattleTech ..... FASA  
Tapestries, Magic the Gathering ..... Harper Prism  
Write-In \_\_\_\_\_  
Mfr: \_\_\_\_\_

**21. Best Professional Gaming Magazine**

*Note: Dragon Magazine is in the Hall of Fame, thus ineligible.*  
The Duelist ..... Wizards of the Coast  
IF Interactive Fantasy ..... Hogshead Publishing  
InQuest ..... Wizard Press  
Pyramid ..... Steve Jackson Games  
Shadis ..... Alderac Entertainment  
The Unspeakable Oath ..... Pagan Publishing  
Write-In \_\_\_\_\_  
Mfr: \_\_\_\_\_

**22. Best Amateur Adventure Gaming Magazine**

Alarums & Excursions ..... Lee Gold  
All of the Above ..... Lee Graham  
Berg's Review of Games ..... Richard Berg  
MWAN ..... Al Thinglam  
The Zouave ..... ACW Society  
Write-In \_\_\_\_\_  
Mfr: \_\_\_\_\_

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BY LESTER SMITH

# WEASEL GAMES #3

## WEASEL GAMES #3: THE WEASEL GAME AS MORALITY PLAY

Weasel games are all about underhanded, sneaky, manipulative play in which your current ally becomes your deadliest enemy but neglects to tell you so until *after* sabotaging your plans. Obviously, then, people play them for fun and relaxation.

But there is a serious side to weasel games as well. In a way, they serve as a sort of modern morality play. Allow me to explain.

### AN OMNIVORE SPEAKS

I have three basic problems with vegetarianism. First, human beings have teeth designed for an omnivorous diet; some are for grinding vegetables, and others are for tearing meat. Second, there are a few essential nutrients that we cannot get from strictly vegetarian fare. Third, plants are living beings too, and I don't see what's intrinsically better about killing them rather than animals.

Nevertheless, slaying animals *feels* worse to most people, even to carnivores. Recently — at a burger joint — I asked some friends if they would be willing to tour a slaughterhouse with me. The consensus response was, "Euuwww! We don't want to see that." Lest readers think me some sort of ghoul, let me explain that my reason for wanting to tour a slaughterhouse is not to revel in the killing. Rather, I want to face the fact that animals are dying and being butchered for my consumption. It's a thought that is easy to ignore while chewing on processed, packaged meats. But I don't think we do ourselves or the animals any favors by remaining blissfully ignorant.

So what does all this have to do with weasel games? Well, like vegetarians watching burgers fry, or pretty much anyone visiting a slaughterhouse, some people find weasel games distasteful. Their sensibilities are offended by the thought that in these games, players use every cutthroat, back-stabbing, sneaky trick they can think of in order to win. They suspect that by doing so, we inure ourselves to such evils, making

them more tempting to us in real life.

I'm of the opposite opinion. Ignoring an aspect of human nature doesn't make it go away, and repressing it just forces it to manifest in more subtle ways. Weasel games, on the other hand, provide safe, fictional arenas in which we can explore our darker, competitive side. In doing so, we achieve a sort of catharsis. As H. G. Wells is reported to have said, "Let there be peace on Earth, and war on the tabletop." But catharsis isn't the only benefit weasel games have to offer. In them, we also get a chance to see how distasteful "weaselness" can be in real life.

### NUKES... WHY DID IT HAVE TO BE NUKES?

I grew up during the sixties. As a result, I spent my childhood with the fear of a mushroom cloud hanging over my head, so to speak. I'm still stunned that the US had the audacity to use an A-bomb on Hiroshima, and then again on Nagasaki six days later. I imagine the rest of the globe walking on egg shells, wondering when we might get angry and do it again. Obviously, the thought of nukes disturbs me.

About six years ago, while attending a game convention in Los Angeles, I noticed some people playing the brand new *Supremacy* game. It is a game of power politics in the 20th Century, in which players wrestle for control of three primary assets: grain, minerals, and oil. In part, the struggle is an economic one; as players buy and sell on the world market, prices rise and fall dramatically in response, and clever players can manipulate the market to make themselves rich at everyone else's expense. But straight-up warfare also plays a part in the game, with troops and fleets moving about to defend or attack resource areas. And then there are the nukes.

The nukes were the first thing I noticed about the game. Play was pretty well along in that Los Angeles game when I happened by, and several black plastic mushroom clouds stood upon the

SPEAKING OF NUKES... THE AMERICAN GOVERNMENT ORGANIZATION "NEST" IS RESPONSIBLE FOR PATROLLING THE COUNTRY IN AN ATTEMPT TO HEAD OFF ACTS OF NUCLEAR TERRORISM BEFORE THEY OCCUR. NEST OPERATIVES CRUISE AIRPORTS AND OTHER KEY AREAS WITH PORTABLE NEUTRON COUNTERS, SCANNING FOR FISSIONABLE MATERIALS.



war-room style political map. It all looked so clean and antiseptic, so far from the blasted ruins it represented, that I shuddered.

A few years later, a friend picked up a copy of the game and asked me by to play. I gave it a try... several times, in fact. Overall, the game is admirable, with a solid design and high-quality components. I love manipulating the market. But I can't get over the nukes. There are two moments in play that I find particularly chilling, because of what they have to say about our modern world.

The first one is an artifact of how nukes are constructed. To build nukes in the game, you first have to pay for the design research. You pay a base amount of cash and resources, then begin flipping cards from the resource deck, paying an additional amount of cash for each one, until finally a nuke card turns up. Your turn ends there, with one nuke built — the prototype. Next turn, you can build any number of additional nukes, simply by paying a flat amount of cash and resources for each one. Typically, because I focused on playing the market, I was the first player to build nukes. Thus, whenever another player decided to research them, I was faced with a sinister decision: "Do I blast him off the face of the earth now, before he can build a retaliatory set of nukes, or do I let him join the nuclear club?" The temptation to get the first strike in was strong, and it made me wonder how the human race ever survived the sixties' cold war. I guess the fact that we did says something positive about us.

The second scary moment involves games in which a number of nukes have been dropped. The rules impose a limit of thirteen; after that the global ecosystem is so screwed up that nobody wins. But if I am losing the game already, and twelve nukes have been dropped, I am tempted to play nuclear terrorist, threatening to drop the thirteenth if the other players don't give me some serious concessions. Again, the real-world implications are frightening. All it takes is one nuke in the hands of someone desperate enough, and a city of ten million people or more goes up in radioactive smoke.

Remember, the basic premise of *Supremacy* is control of world resources. This is not a game of sharing, but domination, and that is what leads to two such chilling moments. There is a lesson in there somewhere, if we are not too timid to see it.



## **Cthulhu for President!**

We here at Shadis are proud to announce our official endorsement of the Elder Party and their Presidential candidate, Great Cthulhu. Why? The American public loves simple answers to complicated questions, and Cthulhu has the *simplest* answers to even the most difficult questions.

Cthulhu is unlike any other candidate you could vote for. He's right up front about all the issues. Most candidates will lie right to your face, saying that *you* are the most important thing on the agenda. Cthulhu has no such qualms; he'll tell you right to your face just how important you *really* are!

When Cthulhu wins, he will rise up from his underwater grave and rule the world with an iron fist. No more crime, no more interest rates, no more taxes, just eternal servitude to the Great Cthulhu! How can you go wrong? Run right out and register, and on November 2nd, you know who to vote for. Vote for the candidate who lays it all on the line. In 1996...

## **Don't Settle For The Lesser Evil!**



Next issue we'll introduce you to the candidates from FASA—Arthur Vogel ("One World" Party), Dr. Rozilyn Hernandez (New Century party), James Booth (Technocratic Party), Gen. Franklin Yeats (Republican), Kenneth Brackhaven (Archconservative Party), and Dunkelzhan (Independent).

# **ALBENING**



# NEWS

GAMING INDUSTRY  
NEWS BY STEVE  
JOHNSON

## WHAT IN THE WORLD IS NEVERWORLD?

ForEverWorld Books has announced the release of their True Fantasy Role Playing Game, *NeverWorld: A Lifetime Experience*. It will include 35 comprehensive cultures, allowing players to choose their own style of entertainment. The boxed set will include the *NeverWorld* sourcebook, the R.O.C. table, the first of 35 independent cultures, the (only) two dice required to play, game master screen, player's character sheets and a full-color map to hang on your wall. Due date is GenCon '96, so get ready for *NeverWorld*!

PREPARE FOR BLOOD DAWN - THE NEW POST-HOLOCAUST GAME FROM OPTIMUS DESIGN SYSTEMS (YEP, THE BATTLELORDS GUYS). WE'LL TELL ALL NEXT ISSUE. . .

## EARTHDOWN MAGIC AND THE SECRETS OF SUPER TUESDAY

*Magic: A Manual of Mystic Secrets* is the sorcerous sourcebook for *Earthdown*, FASA's excellent FRPG (see this and last issue for our *Earthdown* Giveaway) and it's in stores now! It includes new talents, spell creation, enchanting, and rules for astral space, the home of the Horrors. Go check it out.

Also, don't forget *Super Tuesday*! FASA's been running a campaign for President in their Shadowrun universe, and it's a tight race among five candidates including a dwarf, a wizard and a dragon! Check out *Super Tuesday*, due to be released sometime in April.

## MAYFAIR DOES D.C.!

Washington, D.C. and New York will be the next expansions for the *SimCity* Collectible Card Game by Mayfair. The Washington, D.C. deck will be released in April with New York following it up in May.

## "THE END" CONTINUES. . .

*The End* (our favorite post-apocalypse game) has announced its release schedule for support material. The *Judge's Screen* is available now and *The Atlanta Confederation* should be out soon. Also keep your eyes open for the *Washington D.C. Sourcebook*. We've heard a rumor about what's lurking in the old capitol, and it ain't pretty. (See John Wick's review of *The End* in *Shadis* #23.)

## AN OLD FRIEND RETURNS

Highlander Games has just announced the release of *Chivalry & Sorcery*, 3rd Edition. This completely revised edition will be released in November. Previous and new supplements will be released and re-released, starting with a *Game Masters' Handbook* which will follow the release of the basic game. For more information contact Highlander Games, 31 Greenlawn Road, Sound Beach NY 11789 or fax them at 516-821-7090.

## AVALON HILL TAKES TO THE AIR

Fans of Avalon Hill's *Rail Baron* board game will get a lift out of this one. *Air Baron*, the new airline strategy game puts you in the chair of an aerial entrepreneur, trying to gain control of the skies! The Avalon Hill guys really take that old Japanese adage "Business is war!" to heart, so if you think there's nothing brutal about commercial warfare, you'd better think again.



## GET NOIR!

If you're a fan of pulp fiction detective fiction, hold on to your socks. Archon Games has just announced the release of *Noir*, a game based on the works of Raymond Chandler, Dashielle Hammet and other chroniclers of the gumshoe genre (for a more modern treatment, take a peek at Frank Miller's *Sin City*, which can be found in any comic store). Tentative release date for the basic set is July '96. *Shades of Noir*, a short fiction anthology, will be released about the same time. For more information, you can write Archon Gaming at PO Box 5696 Bloomington IN 40408.

## CASTING LIGHT ON FADING SUNS

We got a sneak peek at ex-White Wolfers' Andrew (Vampire line director) Greenberg and Bill (Werewolf line director) Bridges' latest project—*Fading Suns*. It looks incredible! It's got the political intrigue of *Dune* mixed with the military feel of *Warhammer 40,000*, and even throws in a dash of theology. It looks like *Fading Suns* has something for everyone.

## THE MAN WHO WOULD DEFY AN EMPIRE

His father made him promise he would defy the Romans, and for seventeen years, he thwarted the greatest Empire that the world has ever seen. Hannibal: Rome vs. Carthage is the next release from Avalon Hill. For those of you who remember such releases as *Machiavelli*, you know that AH is a stickler for excellence when it comes to strategy.

## SQUASHING PALLADIUM RUMORS, ONCE AGAIN

Palladium wishes to dispel the industry rumor that they're going to be purchasing White Wolf Game Studio. It would also like to be the first to announce that author C.J. Carella has recently left Palladium to join Myrmidon Press as an owner. He's still a freelance writer for Palladium and is currently at work on *Rifts: Psyscape*; he promises *Nightbane World Book 2: Nightlands* will be done by May. Good luck, C.J.!

In less controversial news, Palladium Fantasy Second Edition will be ship sometime around April 26th.

## GOINGS-ON AT STEVE JACKSON GAMES

For ten years, *Tempete sur l'Echequier* ("Storm on the Chessboard") has been all the rage in France. It's a card/chess game that allows you to throw the random element into the 5,000 year old game of strategy. Now, Steve Jackson Games announces the American release of *Tempete in Nightmare Chess*! It will be a single set of 80 full-color oversized cards painted by Brazilian artist Rogerio Vilela. Players will also need a standard chess set to play the game.

SJG has also signed a deal with Terry Pratchett for publication of *GURPS: Discworld*. Pratchett himself will co-author the book with John M. Ford, winner of both the World Fantasy Award and two Origins Awards. *GURPS: Discworld* has a tentative release date of early 1997.

## WEB GAMES CONTEST

Web Games is running a character creation contest for *Web of Stars*! Send them your favorite character for *Web of Stars* and you could win a \$50 prize along with getting published in a module. The best 10 entries will be published in the upcoming *Webs Character File*. (See Dirk Dejong's review of *Web of Stars* in *Shadis* #23.)



KEEP YOUR EYES PEELED FOR NOIR AND FADING SUNS. WE'RE SURE THEY'RE GOING TO MAKE A SPLASH. BY THE WAY, IF YOU LIKE CHANDLER AND THE FILM NOIR GENRE, YOU SHOULD CHECK OUT THE SCI-FI NOVEL *GLIN*, WITH OCCASIONAL MUSIC BY JONATHAN LETHEM. THE BEST WAY TO DESCRIBE IT IS AS A CROSS BETWEEN CHANDLER AND PHILIP K. DICK. IT'S WEIRD, BUT IT'S VERY GOOD.

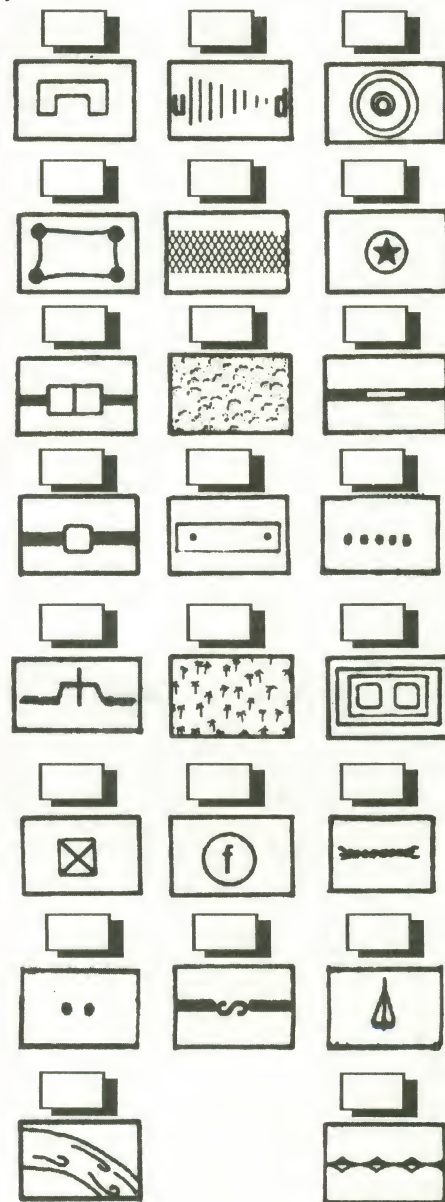
STARS



# TEST YOUR DUNGEON-CRAWLING SKILLS

IN THE SPIRIT OF TSR'S MASSIVE TRIVIA CONTEST WE THOUGHT WE'D INCLUDE OUR OWN AD&D MINUTIA QUIZ. MATCH THE MAP SYMBOLS BELOW TO THE LABELS IN THE LIST. SEE IF YOU CAN SPOT THE 3 FAKE LABELS. THE FIRST PERSON TO SEND US A POSTCARD WITH THE NAMES OF THE 3 FAKES WILL WIN SOME AD&D STUFF FROM THE SHADIS VAULT O' GAMES!

1. ALTAR
2. ANT BRIDGE
3. BARRED WINDOW
4. BOXING RING
5. CARPET
6. DOOR
7. DOUBLE DOOR
8. FIREPLACE
9. FOUNTAIN
10. GALLOWS
11. HEAVY WOODS
12. LADDER
13. LIGHT WOODS
14. PENTAGRAM
15. PIT
16. PORTCULLIS
17. RIVER
18. SECRET DOOR
19. STABLE
20. STAIRS
21. STATUE
22. THORN BARRIER
23. THRONES
24. TRAP DOOR
25. WINCH
26. WINDOW



SEND A POSTCARD WITH  
YOUR ANSWERS TO  
DUNGEON CRAWL CONTEST,  
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# Plays Well with Others

by Matt Patterson



## SO YOU THINK YOU'RE A VAMPIRE?

They creep into the night. Some paint their faces white with red specks of fake blood. Others wear long cloaks to conceal their wispy, undernourished frames. The rest appear perfectly normal, not unlike you or me. They gather together in hotel conference rooms across the country to share in a night of conflict, feasting, and fantasy. A fantasy in which they're stalking, blood-thirsty vampires. Unfortunately, some people there seem a little shaky on the fantasy part.

I decided to join a convention-sponsored live-action role playing game of *Vampire: The Masquerade*. Basically, a bunch of High School Drama Club dorks get together and pretend they're undead. Since I am one of those myself, I seemed qualified to play. The rules are unclear to me but seem to involve a lot of yelling and waving your arms around. I looked forward to joining them in their sickening orgy.

Right off the bat, I was disappointed. The evening's objective was not to suck the life from innocent, virginal hotel guests, but to unite the feuding vampire clans together. What happened to Von Helsing? The leaky castles? The garlic? Apparently they don't do that "Stoker stuff". When we broke into smaller groups to discuss what had to be done to achieve our dubious objective my spirits sagged.

"Hearken to me! The other Clans will not hear of us uniting and will strike us where we stand!" As the speaker droned on in a nasal, Shakespearean tone, I stared in disbelief. Did he really say, 'Hearken?' What good ghoulish talk like he is hawking sausages at the Renaissance Faire? If there were any justice, Bela Lugosi's morphine-



preserved corpse would've made an unannounced visit and given this faux-fiend some speech lessons.

I was also astonished at the stupid-looking hats some people were wearing. I'm not talking about hooded cowls or gauzy veils (which would be acceptable), but leather safari hats, purple velveteen raver's headgear, soiled baseball caps, and even a cowboy hat! What ever happened to a good old-fashioned widow's peak haircut? Is that so out of style?

When did Morrissey's Xtacy-loving fans become the poster children for the undead? I blame Anne Rice. I blame those *Sandman* comics. I blame YOU for standing by idly while the very concept of vampire mutated into something hip and sexy! I left the game, grabbed my trusty pitchfork and flaming torch, and marched back to my peasant village vowing to become a minion of the true Romanian über-vamp, Dracula. The monsters I left behind would pay for their disrespect!

It didn't take long for my plan to unfold. A new Aaron Spelling TV show based on the very same Masquerade mythos premiered the other night. That program will expose these faithless creatures to a media glare so harsh, it will turn them into dust faster than sunlight ever could. What moody hipster would want to simply rehash a TV show like a common Trekkie? Those punks will crawl back into their hidey-holes faster than you can say *Melrose Place Live Action Game*. Now that's something I could get into.

MATT PATTERSON  
(DRBUBONIC@AOL.COM) IS THE  
EDITOR OF OOZE MAGAZINE.  
([HTTP://WWW.IO.COM/~OOZE](http://www.io.com/~ooze))  
HE WOULD ALSO LIKE YOU TO  
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# HAVVAVIPD



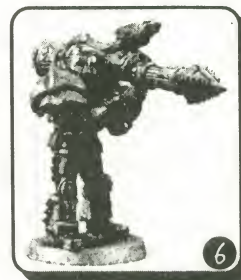
BY KEN CARPENTER

# CASTING CALL

## GLOBAL GAMES

More firepower for their expanding *Legions Of Steel* universe; Global's figures sure pack a punch! The line's prolific sculptor, Dave Summers, has certainly demonstrated why he's numbered among the best artists in the field today.

Global's tabletop version of *LOS* hits the stores within the next month or so—keep an eye out for it.



1. Armed with twin KPVs, this Fantasian T85/37 battle suit is capable of taking out light vehicles at long range. #3221 \$8.00 each

2. The Fantasian Sniper carries the long range SVD sniper rifle, which has great range and a bonus against infantry targets. "Removing leaders takes the enemy command structure off at the head." #3206 \$4.00 each

3. This T85/35 battle suit is equipped with the K2Shaw rocket-propelled Electro-Magnetic Pulse (EMP) weapon. The range and area of the weapon give it a commanding presence on the battlefield. #3223 \$8.00 each

4. Among the most powerful leaders in the game, the Black Empire's Arraith Drakkar is heavily armed and an excellent leader. Let's not ignore the impressiveness of the figure, either! #3060 \$13.00 each

5. Serving the Black Empire as the standard unit leader, the Aseth Drakkar doesn't look like someone you'd wanna talk back to. #3002 \$4.00 each

6. The Adrax Takkar, armed with the Adrax rocket launcher, provides long range support during Black Empire offensives. #3042 \$9.00 per two



# CASTING CALL

## REAPER MINIATURES

Reaper started with all the old Heritage molds and then started adding a bunch of their own stuff. For their Dark Heaven line, Reaper gathered a few of the best sculptors in the business and let them to use their imagination... so they did. Here are some of the results:



1



2



3



4

1. Julie Guthrie, who hasn't done a lot in the gaming miniatures industry for a while, returned with a vengeance. Tox is a masterpiece of conjuration! #2005 \$1.65 each

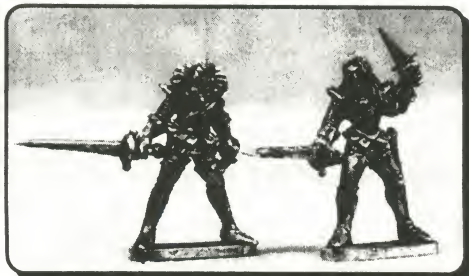
2. One more of Julie's, Krupp is a fantastically detailed spell caster that is heavy on the personality and stance. It's bound to be a pleasure to paint! #2009 \$1.65

3. Sandra Garrity, another wonderful sculpting talent, contributes heavily to the presence of the Dark Heaven line with, among others, Sidreth, a daring female warrior that, now get this, isn't in a bikini! #2006 \$1.65

4. Another of Sandra's figures, Vlad (now who hasn't wanted to name a character Vlad?) is a highly detailed warrior/priest. A must see—this is a paint job waiting to happen. #2010 \$1.65

## GRENADIER MODELS

Far from resting on their laurels, Grenadier has been adding some great stuff to existing lines as well as adding new lines. Here we have some cool figs from their Fantasy Warriors & Future Warriors lines. Look them over and let us know what you think...



➤ "Graceful but deadly" is how you'd have to classify these Battle Elf Champions. Details are sharp, as are their weapons... #8518 \$4.00 blister of two

⊕ Another Future Warrior classic, this Rebel Assault Team boasts great detail, movement, and entertainment value! Break out the dice and toss in your move-in-cover orders! #1540 \$4.00 per blister

# MINIATURES



# Win your own REvolution!

## CYBER GENERATION

**How do you enter the "Win your own REvolution contest?" It's easy! Just send us an idea for your own YoGang or Cyberevolved Type. Follow the format in the Cybergeneration book and send it on in. We'll pick 2 winners from each category (YoGang & Cyberevolved) and each winner will receive a full set of the *Cybergeneration* line!**

### Here's What You Win:

Cybergeneration  
(2nd Ed)

Bastille Day

EcoFront

MediaFront

VirtualFront

&

Generation Gap

(to be published in June)

Only one entry per household, please. If you've won the last contest (and you know who you are) please, let somebody else get a shot. Entries must be received by June 1, 1996. No employee or direct relative of employees of either AEG or R. TALSORIAN GAMES are eligible to win. Winners will be notified by mail. Good luck!



# IN THE TRENCHES

## LESSON THREE: SHOVE THAT NEW STUFF IN THEIR FACES! BY BRYAN WINTER

Quick quiz for you game retailers out there: How much do you make in a month from new releases? How does that number compare to sales of products that have been around for a few months or longer? If your store is selling more backlist than new products, then you're in the wrong business. You should be on the lecture circuit, charging a hefty fee to tell us how you did it.

New products pay the rent. A store can't exist by trying to sell *Panzerblitz* to every customer who walks in the door. It may be your favorite game, but you're not in this to convert the masses; you're in it to make money.

When you first pull that spanking new *Vampire: The Masquerade* supplement out of the box, do you walk it over to your *Vampire* section and just stick it in? When that new batch of *Necromunda* figures arrives, do you shove 'em in with the rest of the lot? Chances are that's exactly what you do.

Here's an experiment. Go to your local video rental hut on a Friday night. In a fifteen-minute period of time, count how many people go to the "New Releases" section versus how many people hit the archives. The reason a video store has a New Releases section is to highlight the new stuff. Most people go to the video store with no idea what they are going to rent. They want something fresh and new, something they haven't seen before. Usually they end up renting something they didn't even know was released! Those people simply would not hunt through the entire Comedy section on the off-chance that the latest Jim Carey laugh-fest was available.

Gamers are no different. They come to your store looking for the new stuff. They drop by on the off-chance that the latest TSR adventure-fest is available. They don't want to hunt amongst the items they either already have or don't care about.

Every store needs a New Releases section. It doesn't have to be big. In my store I devoted two end-caps near the register, one for paper products and one for figs. I cycled the products through and as the newer stuff came in the older stuff went to

the shelves. It is very simple to do a quick inventory of these items when you are on the phone with your distributor, and even less painful to tack-on an extra copy or two of a product that is moving.

If you read this article last month, you will see the direct tie-in with your New Releases section and your shrink-wrap machine. As soon as a new product comes in, rip off that shrink wrap and put it in your New Releases section. Let your customers have a serious look at them. You can always wrap them back up again.

I've been to stores where the answer to this is a big dry-erase board next to the front door with all of the new products that have come in and the date they arrived. This is great, but it isn't enough. Half of game sales are impulse buys. It's one thing to see *Castle-O'-Death* on the Big Board, but it's quite another when the customer actually sees the product and realizes, "Hey, this is a new supplement to the *Hack 'n' Slash* RPG! I didn't know this was coming out!"

I know what some of you are thinking: "But Bryan, I WANT them to dig through those shelves. There's stuff in there I want them to buy!" No doubt about it. But I'll argue every time that when your customers come in they are either "just looking around" or they are looking for something specific. If they are just looking, that means they are just looking for something new. Give it to them on a silver platter! If they are looking for a specific item, they'll find it no matter what new items are available. But I guarantee they'll stop by the New Releases section on the way!

Everyone who comes into your store will browse the New Releases section *every time* they come in. And that is actually one of the best reasons to set up a New Release section, because New Releases drive the sales of old products. If a customer keeps seeing the cool supplements that are coming out for a game he does not play, he may very well be inclined to check that game out. That would never happen if the new stuff was immediately shoved into a section that customer would never visit on his own!

Next month we sing old 60's songs: "To Everything, Turn, Turn, Turn..."

# WANT

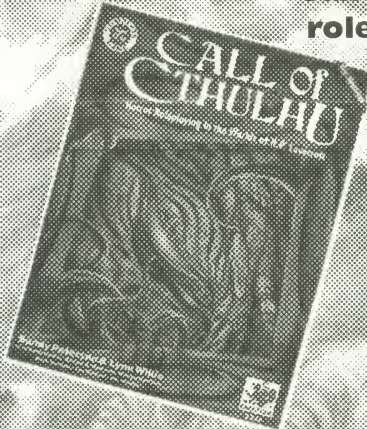
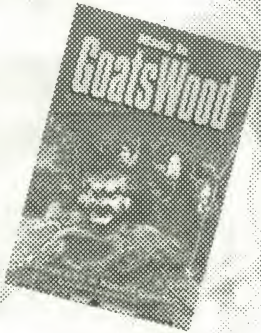
IN THE TRENCHES IS A MONTHLY ARTICLE DEDICATED TO THE GAME RETAILER. EACH MONTH WE WILL PROVIDE READERS WITH METHODS TO IMPROVE CUSTOMER SATISFACTION, STORE APPEARANCE, SALES TECHNIQUES, AND PROFITS!



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Chaosium's Cthulhu Cycle fiction presents many of the the original stories of the Cthulhu Mythos on which the *Mythos* cardgame is based, as well as many new stories by modern authors.



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<http://www.sirius.com/~chaosium/chaosium.html>



# Dirk's Disinformation

Dirk here! I've just returned from the GAMA trade show and I have a veritable cornucopia of news to report. I got scoops from all across the show and talked with some of the biggest names in the industry. Being a Master Thief, I was able to provide myself with a Press Badge and reconnoiter every booth at the show. Here's the news I brought back (the stuff I'm willing to share, that is!):

## YOU HEARD IT HERE FIRST—JILL LUCAS PROMISES NEW FASA GAME WILL HAVE GENRE!

As I perused the FASA booth, I happened across the lovely, talented and charming Jill Lucas. When I inquired about which genre FASA would be using for their next role-playing game, she said with a wicked smile, "Oh, don't worry, it'll have genre."

## PALLADIUM BUYS OUT WHITE WOLF!

One of the most exciting moments of my excursion was my extraplanar meeting with Lord Kevin of Siembieda, Grand Master of the Palladium Plane of Existence. He contacted me via planar telepathy and gave me a most startling quest: reveal to the world that Palladium was indeed *not* intending to purchase the Dark Dimension of White Wolf. The vicious rumor was obviously started by some trickster god and had no basis in fact. I thanked Lord Kevin for the chance to serve him—of course, the complimentary copy of Nightbane he sent to me didn't hurt!

## MIKE SAGER'S TALE OF THE TABLE

Mike Sager from Thunder Castle told me a wondrous story about his grandfather. It seems he was a man who often spoke of the evils of gambling, but liked to tell the tale of the time that he shot the dice in magnificent Atlantic City. He rolled the bones at a table well into the wee hours of the night, and his luck never ran out. He played and played until a single roll put his winnings over a half of a million dollars. Then, abruptly, he pulled all of his winnings off the table. The other players cried out, but he raised

his hands and said, "No one will ever lose to this table again," and he *bought the table itself* with his \$500,000. It should be noted that Mr. Sager did not have the fortune that his grandfather did with the dice that weekend.

## MR. DANCEY EXPOUNDS ON THE ART OF GAMBLING

With dice in hand and a thousand dollars on the table, Ryan Dancey of Isomedia was heard to say, "Craps isn't gambling. Making a collectible card game, now that's gambling."

## ALL ABOUT THE MAYFAIR MILWAUKEE RESEARCH TEAM

When it was discovered that over half the cards in the Milwaukee expansion for *SimCity* would be breweries, the entire staff of Mayfair Games volunteered to be part of the research team.

Last but not least ...

## SHARON STONE AT LAST UNICORN GAMES!

One of my most interesting excursions included the purchase of my first collectible card game—*Heresy: Kingdom Come*. Of course, this had nothing to do with the rumor that Sharon Stone was at the Last Unicorn Games booth. It all turned out to be a case of mistaken identity. Ms. Moore (the lovely and talented sister of Christian Moore, one of the Last Unicorn guys) was the woman in question, and while she did bear a striking resemblance to Ms. Stone, I must say that she is much more lovely and much more talented.



# HAVVABRD



# CYBER GENERATION

- R. TALSORIAN GAMES
- \$21.95/248 PAGES
- REVIEWED BY W. G. RODMIN

The first thing that I noticed about *Cybergeneration* was not the flashy graphics (which are very impressive) or the dynamic layout (which is also eye-catching). No, the thing that impressed me most with the game was the way that it teaches you how to play it. From the very beginning, the book treats you as if you are in the game, a participant in the world. It's a flash forward from R. Talsorian's famous *Cyberpunk* RPG, in a world where the cyberpunks have sold out. You play the children of the old 'punks, trying to find your own identity in a world of flash, style and no substance. The corporations have really got a hold of everything now (just wait till you see what Arasaka looks like twenty years down the road!) and they've corralled everyone into nice, neat little corporate blocks. The outside world is a total mess and nature has been exploited to the brink of extinction. As the younger generation, you of course rebel against everything your parents fought for. The only problem is, you aren't even old enough to shave.

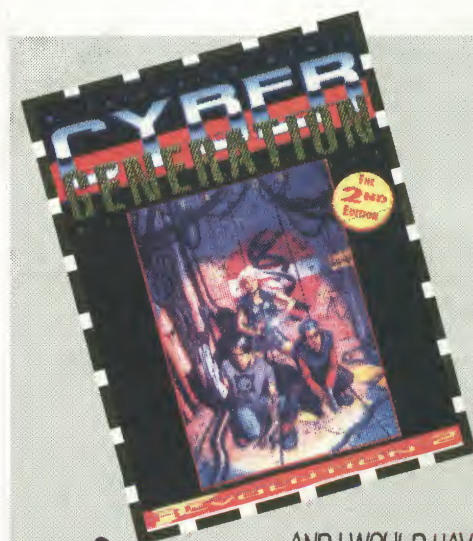
*Cybergeneration* takes a very different look at the cyberpunk genre (as I read it, I was reminded of a book I read in grammar school called *The Girl Who Owned A City*, which should be required reading for this or any other dark future RPG), a perspective that is from the children of the age. You begin the book with an introduction from an NPC who speaks to you throughout the texts. You go through the book listening to his instruction as he teaches you about the world, character creation and game mechanics. There's even a "datapad" for character creation. All the information you need is listed on one page formatted to look like a hand-held datapad. It's incredibly useful and builds the atmosphere even more. This is one of the most original and effective approaches I've ever seen to teaching a player and game master how to play your game (although Mr. Pondsmyth did take a very similar approach in his fabulous game *Castle Falkenstein*, which is also worth a look-see).

Anyone who has played *Cyberpunk* before will recognize the system employed. It's a simple d10 difficulty number system, but there's a bit of a twist. You see, as a twelve year old, you aren't as

good at sneaking about as a professional assassin. That's why he's got a Stealth skill and you've got a Blend skill. Your skills only count at half their value when you're using them against adults. You've got to spend a lot of XP's to get your skills up to the "grump" level. It's just another example of how well R. Talsorian has considered the fact that these are kids in a grown-up world.

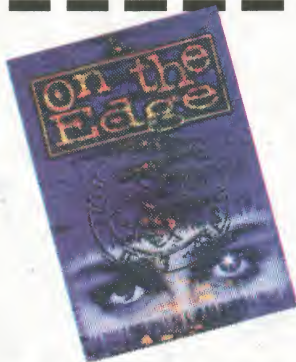
The kids do have one advantage, however. A virus has been spreading across the globe, killing some and... changing others. The virus changes the kids' genes, giving them powers beyond reason. For some, their skin turns to steel, for others, they gain a limited degree of control over electricity. Many just die painfully, but for those who gain these strange powers, the possibilities are limitless. The corporations are very aware of these mutations, however, and are on the lookout for the "cyberevolved."

Dodging corporation bloodhounds, sabotaging executive bathrooms and disappearing into tight places where grown-ups can't go: that's what a *Cybergeneration* game is all about. Never give up, never sell out and keep the REvolution alive!



...AND I WOULD HAVE  
GOTTEN AWAY WITH IT TOO, IF  
IT WEREN'T FOR YOU  
MEDDLING KIDS!





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☐ **JOANNA D'FABELLE**  
A "courageous" agent of the Trident Conspiracy



☐ **ERIK GUDNE**  
Another Trident operative infiltrating the Aries gang



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A Quisling "cloak" serving the Pharaohs: Master of Mankind



☐ **PEPPER GRANGE**  
He knows what he likes and whacks what he doesn't.

Only one entry per household, please. And if you're already part of the conspiracy (an employee of AEG or Atlas, or related to one) you can't sell out again. No substitutions or cash refunds. Offer void where restricted. Entries must be received by June 1, 1996. Winners will be chosen randomly from completed ballots. If you've won a *Shadis* contest in 60 days, sit back, relax and let someone else win for a change. *On the Edge*, and all characters and conspiracies are © & ™ Atlas Games. Fnord.



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# EVERWAY™

VISIONARY ROLEPLAYING

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- REVIEWED BY JOHN WICK



*Everway* is an unique role-playing game. From the first time I opened it, I knew that I was going to be in for a wild ride. Wizards of the Coast certainly made it pretty to look at. They also got one of the most unique and innovative minds in the industry to design it. It comes in a big box and inside that box are three books, a deck of Tarot-like cards for mechanics resolution, full-color character sheets and over two hundred "Vision" and "Quest" cards. But is it worth the thirty-four bucks you have to shell out for it? Take a look...

The first thing you should know is that there are no dice rolling around in that big white box. Now, this doesn't mean it's a diceless system, it's just that Lady Luck is wearing a different dress in this game: she isn't rolling dice, she's drawing cards. There's a lot to be said for a card based system. Dice are very linear, while cards allow a wide range of variants. The "Fortune Deck" provided in *Everway* allows the game master to add a bit of flavor to the determination of success and failure. *Everway* allows three different resolution systems: The Law of Drama, The Law of Karma, and The Law of Fortune. The Law of Karma simply states that if the player has the stats to pull off the action, the GM should allow the action. It's a quick judgment system that doesn't slow down game play: "I have a 4 and you have a 1. I win." When using the Law of Drama, a GM looks at the needs of the story and that is what determines the success and failure of the player's action. Lastly, the Law of Fortune allows Fate to decide the outcome with a random drawing from the deck. Three different styles for every game master to play with. If one style doesn't suit your taste, use another. The options are limitless.

The world is a multi-dimensional universe with the characters starting in the conjunctural city of *Everway*, where the gateways to a thousand worlds await the players. With an infinite amount of possibilities, you can travel from dimension to dimension, encountering uncountable worlds with the possibilities limited only by your imagination. And when your imagination runs out, that's where the "Vision Cards" come into play. The Vision Cards are colorful and brilliant

images that are to be used by the game master to design adventures. Just look at the image on the front, read the questions on the back, and you've got a dozen ideas for new adventures just by reading a couple cards! It's a very cool idea, fitting into the whole "visionary" theme running through the game. Words are wonderful (I love words, I'm a writer after all), but a single picture is worth more than a thousand words; sometimes it's worth a thousand stories.

The second use for the Vision cards is in character creation. When you create a character, you draw a couple random cards, look at the images, read the questions on the back and start making your character. Use the image as one from your home world, or perhaps as a recurring dream, or as an important story in your character's life. Perhaps even answer the questions on the back in your character's voice, or apply them to his past, providing dark secrets that not even his most trusted friend would know. The Vision Cards are infinitely useful to both game masters and characters.

As I said at the beginning of this review, Wizards of the Coast were the original producers of *Everway*. However, due to changes in their production schedule, the entire role-playing division was canceled and all the products were sold off. Luckily, *Everway* has passed into the very capable hands of Pagan Publishing (whose main voice, John Tynes, was on the design team for the game), a small press company in Seattle that also produces *The Unspeakable Oath* magazine. If the quality of past Pagan Publishing products (say that five times fast) is any indication of what future expansions will look like, we can expect fine supplementary material for *Everway*.

*Everway* is a game quite unlike anything else I've ever seen. The cost is a little high, it may be a bit too off the mainstream for many, and the characters presented are definitely not Conan clones (white Anglo-Saxon males) which many may interpret as a tip of the hat to "political correctness", but all in all, it's a great game that looks at every aspect of gaming from a different perspective. And that's what "visionary" role-playing is all about.

AS JOHN MENTIONED, EVERWAY HAS BEEN PURCHASED BY PAGAN PUBLISHING, THE GUYS WHO MAKE THE UNSPEAKABLE OATH MAGAZINE AND OTHER FINE CALL OF CTHULHU PRODUCTS. LOOK FOR A FULL LINE REVIEW OF PAGAN'S PRODUCTS NEXT ISSUE!

# REVIEWS



## KULT

•METROPOLIS LTD. (LICTOR@AOL.COM)

•\$24.95/272 PAGES

•REVIEWED BY MATT STAROSCIK



AS IF BY FATE, while this article was being laid out a quarterly horror gaming fanzine with a heavy *Kult* emphasis came in the mail. *The Awakening* #1 has *Kult* fiction, GM tips, NPCs, and a nifty article on "constructs"—physical manifestations of humanity's emotions. To subscribe, send a check for \$1.50 for each issue you'd like to receive to Darrell Hardy, 1757 Thomas Ave., Box 1, St. Paul MN 55104. You can also reach him at [arachne@minn.net](mailto:arachne@minn.net). *The Awakening* is 28 pages and apparently printed on a Xerox machine, but the content is good if you are into *Kult*.

Long ago, men were as gods. Modern existence—our captivity on Earth—was the result of a plot by the mysterious entity known as the Demiurge. Now, the otherworldly creatures who were once our servants are our captors, and we are blind to the true Reality which still surrounds us. While the vast majority of humanity is trapped in Elysium, our illusory prison, some individuals are able to break through the veil and perceive Metropolis, the First City.

Metropolis is the birthplace of humanity, the origin of civilization. It is the one city of which all others are merely reflections. Likewise, our cemeteries and battlefields are closely tied to the true hells which are home to a host of vile creatures. Some of these entities from Reality are among us even now, such as the lictors, our jailers.

This is the setting of *Kult*, a modern-day horror RPG from Metropolis Ltd. Its combination of simple, efficient mechanics and a unique premise make it a must-have for the horror gamer. It is not a game for the squeamish; *Kult* does not sugar-coat the world it presents. Moreover, it also deals with topics other many other horror games don't touch—like sexuality. It is certainly a game "for mature players only." This being said, it is important to note that *Kult* maintains a high standard of quality at all times and none of the mature issues it presents are dealt with in poor taste.

The book is 272 pages, perfect-bound, and the interior art is printed mostly in black and red. Interior illustrations are less frequent than in many RPGs, but do a good job of evoking the game's mood. An index and blank character sheet are also included.

*Kult*'s mechanics are easy to learn and flexible. There are eight stats and a point-based character generation system. More than fifteen example character archetypes are included but the skill-based character creation insures that players will not be restricted to them. The archetypes are well-written and moreover most of them are illustrated in full color. To help flesh out the characters, an advantage and disadvantage system is used. It is very well done; the options included are well-suited to the horror genre.

The *Kult* system also sports a clever set of rules for car chases and vehicular combat, burning and drowning, drug use, poisons, martial arts, travel, and more. If you are one of those gamers who's always using bits and pieces of rules from different games *Kult* will give you some great parts to play with. The combat system is simple and direct, but may not be realistic enough for more demanding gamers. It falls somewhere between *White Wolf's*

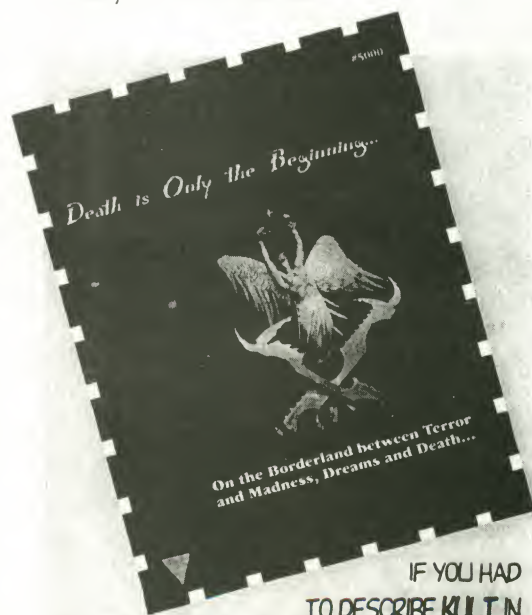
Storyteller system and *Battlelords of the 23rd Century* in overall complexity.

Rules for magic are also included and while the system meshes well with *Kult*'s feel it is shorter than some might desire—those wishing for massive spell lists will be disappointed. That's not as much of a problem as it might seem because PCs in *Kult* are not intended to be magic powerhouses—they must rely on their wits and mundane skills most of the time. (*Kult* is similar to *Call of Cthulhu* in this respect.) There are six different magic Lores, which are like "spheres" in other games: Madness, Time & Space, Dreams, Death, Passion, and Reality.

While the rules are truly well done, the game's real strength is the setting. It evokes the mood of such horror environments as *Hellraiser* without being derivative. A wealth of information is given on Metropolis, Inferno, the realm of dreams, the Labyrinth and other otherworldly places. The creatures that inhabit these places—Archons, lictors, death angels, Cairath, Purgatides, Razides, and more—are also detailed. Naturally, a section on cults is also present. Several supplements are already available, too; the *Metropolis Sourcebook* review follows, and we hope to cover the rest of the line in future issues of *Shadis*.

Tired of werewolves? Do you long for something more intense than vampires? Explore the world between terror and madness, between dreams and death that is *Kult*.

See you on the other side...



IF YOU HAD  
TO DESCRIBE KULT IN  
TWO WORDS, THEY'D BE "HELLRAISER RPG."  
BUT THAT DOES NOT BEGIN TO DO THE GAME  
JUSTICE. HARD-CORE HORROR FANS (YOU  
KNOW WHO YOU ARE) NEED THIS GAME.



## REVIEWS

### METROPOLIS SOURCEBOOK FOR KULT

- METROPOLIS LTD. (LICTOR@AOL.COM)
- \$19.95
- REVIEWED BY MATT STAROSCIK

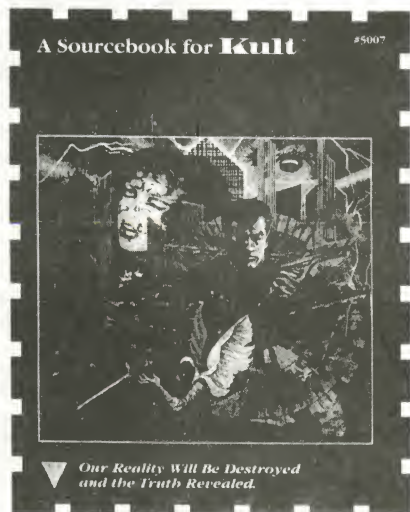


This volume is almost a necessity for the *Kult* GM—not because the main rulebook is lacking, but because of the strength of the material presented. Metropolis, the First City, is described in chilling detail as are many, many ways for the players to get there. This supplement does a superb job of evoking a mood, of conveying the unique feel that *Kult* has. In the hands of a skilled GM, it can be a powerful tool for running some very memorable games.

Each domain within Metropolis is described in great detail. GMs will be able to terrorize players with the horrors that await within the Machine City, the Memory Banks, the Primal Sea and many other locales. Numerous encounters are presented which can be used as “wandering monsters” by GMs. There are detailed NPC profiles, too. As in the main rules, reviewed on the previous page, this book is not for the squeamish. In fact, it may present more gore than any other roleplaying product on the market.

The one fault this product has is that it gives little assistance on the design of full-length adventures. *Kult* is a unique sort of game and even imaginative players could initially have problems creating campaigns for it. It would have been nice to see some more campaign ideas in the *Metropolis Sourcebook* along with the the myriad atmosphere-enhancing “quickie” encounters presented. Luckily, Metropolis Ltd. is releasing *Kult* campaign books to help out.

Overall, the *Metropolis Sourcebook* is a great product for the *Kult* GM. If you liked the *Kult* main rules, you'll love this product. If you didn't like *Kult* at first, this will certainly not change your mind.



### MEKTON ZETA PLUS: ADVANCED TECHNICAL MANUAL

- R. TALSORIAN GAMES, INC.
- BY BENJAMIN WRIGHT AND MICHAEL MACDONALD
- \$18.00
- REVIEWED BY RICH WARREN

For those who do not know, *Mekton Zeta* is the third edition of R. Talsorian's anime-based, giant-robot RPG. Unlike other games of this genre, *Mekton Zeta* tries to provide a platform for recreating almost any anime style, and R. Talsorian claims that *Mekton Zeta Plus* allows us to build any mecha imaginable.

It doesn't. But it comes close.

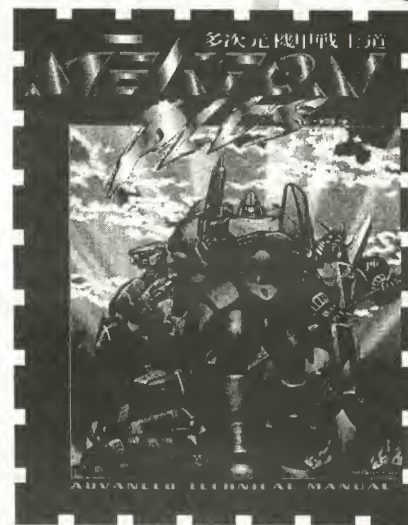
*Mekton Zeta Plus* provides detailed rules for creating new weapons, armor, shields and sensors. Additional rules allow transforming and combining mecha, remote drones, AIs, and techno-organics. The scaling rules let you design everything from body armor to planet-shattering starships.

Then you have the Stupid Mekton Tricks—those elements of anime that defy rational explanation. Stupid Mekton Tricks include Expanding Plasma (giving a 60-ton behemoth the ability to transform into a camera or pocket watch), Ninja Leaping (need I say more) and my personal favorite, Super Deformed Mektons (a nearly indestructible toon variant that gets bonuses based on how cute or scary it is).

MZ+ also provides rules for psionics and psionically controlled mecha, combining *Mekton Zeta* and *Cyberpunk*, and building vicious, nasty alien animals. Finally, the last page lists MZ errata.

This book is well laid out and attractive. R. Talsorian scattered many good, relevant pictures throughout—though they could have used their sidebars more efficiently.

On the down side, MZ+ does not contain the promised advanced space movement rules. The books still suffer from detail-level problems (a few typos, numbers that do not match or add up properly, etc.). Also, the game tries to cover such a broad range of styles that it almost requires GM oversight during mecha creation. Otherwise, you could create mecha that simply do not work together (e.g., Super Deformed Mektons and nearly anything else). On the other hand, with GM oversight and a little creative rule-bending, you can literally design anything you want.



RICH DIDN'T LIKE  
MEKTON ZETA'S  
"UNREALISTIC  
MECHA RULES",  
BUT JANE ST.  
CLAIRE DID. SEE  
HER REVIEW ON  
PAGE 88.

REVIEWS



This is Just The Beginning...

# INVASION

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## REVIEWS

### GANGLAND!

- CORGLENBURG LTD.
- \$19.95
- REVIEWED BY JIM PINTO

"Hey! Hey, Rocco! Hand me dat dere box o' goods.

"Yeah! Da one dat sez Gangland!

"Rocco? If I gotz ta yell, youse gonna get whacked.

"Don't makes me getz ugly."

*Gangland!* by Corglenburg is a "new" idea in card games. The basic box comes with a rulebook (a big honkin' rulebook), a stack of cards (two types — Gangsters and Events), and a six sided die (a big honkin' six sided die; it's friggin' huge) all for the low, low price of 20 samolians (minus a nickel is some states). Did I mention that they're coming out with booster packs for this thing later? That's right, a non-collectable, customizable card game, designed for 3 to 8 players.

*Gangland!* is not revolutionary, but that doesn't mean that it's bad, either. This 3+ player card game is sort of a mix of *Family Business*, *On The Edge*, and *Starship Command*, but the similarities are not superficial. In fact, the game seems to be designed to go as fast as you can think. There are very little "turn" rules, which is to say that it lacks an upkeep phase and a flowchart of activities that can/must be performed. Each character gets an action and that's about it. When they're done, they're done (kinda zen). The characters can do a myriad of things, but most of them require the play of a card, so unless you have a drive-by shooting card, ya can't do it. The extortion of money or the rubbing out of a bodyguard is performed by saying that you're doing it, paying for it, and then doing it. The game ends when the deck has been used twice or all of your enemies are dead. The die is used every once in a while to work out fights and such; and that's about it. Personally, I hate the d6 approach to gaming, but they are easy to come by (although they give you a die for free, so why not make it a d10 or d20 system?).

This game has a structured, sensible (did I mention honkin'?) rule-book and a set of "core" rules that have a lot of expandable possibilities. However, once you begin playing you will notice many "interpretable" rules (i.e. argument catalysts), and a few rules that you have to interpret yourself (i.e. debate instigators). During play, we came up with a list of questions about the game that perhaps gamers should address before shuffling the cards:

- If a character is bribed to join the other side, may he act the turn he comes over to your side? We said no, but you decide!

- We decided that in a three player game it is impossible to finish the deck, so you can do one of two things. Go through the deck once to end the

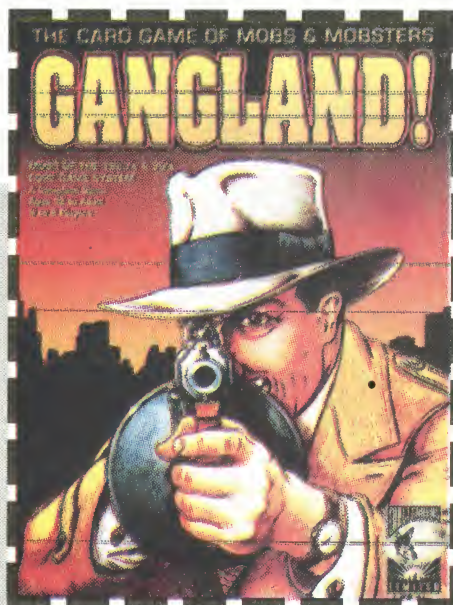
game or discard a free card every turn so that you may cycle through your hand and the deck quicker.

- The IRS card is super powerful and can ruin gameplay. Use it to make the game fun, not bloody. I recommend throwing it out, if it comes up early.

- There are many different kinds of turn loss cards. Do they take effect simultaneously or consecutively?

- The number of harassment cards and arrest cards in the deck should be equal to the number of players in the game (8 in the deck in a three player game is silly).

I would have to give this game a big thumbs up, a B+, an 8, three and a half stars—whatever grade scale works for you. As a role-player first, I love bringing goofy voices and characters to my board and card games (you should see me play *Slasher*). This game had enough moxie to keep me in stupid voices for several hours. I recommend playing through once or twice to try to get down the idea behind the game. After that, most of the situations that will arise, already have, and you can address them with a little more authority.



IF YOU HAVE AT LEAST TWO OTHER FRIENDS WHO LIKE THE IDEA OF ALL-OUT MOB WARFARE THE *GANGLAND!* CARD GAME MIGHT BE JUST WHAT YOU NEED. IT'S NOT A COLLECTIBLE GAME—YOU GET EVERYTHING YOU NEED IN ONE BOX. EXPANSIONS ARE FORTHCOMING.



# REVIEWS



## MEKTON ZETA

•R. TALSORIAN GAMES

•\$19.95/154 PAGES

•WRITTEN BY MACDONALD, PONDSMITH AND WRIGHT

•REVIEWED BY JANE ST. CLAIRE

Back in 1989 a friend of mine who was into Japanese "anime" asked me to help him write up a campaign for this new game he had just picked up called *Mekton 2*. I'd never even seen *Mekton 1*! I told him I'd be happy to help him out, and he invited me over to his house to spend the afternoon watching his videos before we actually sat down and worked out the mechanics. That was the first time I ever saw anime, and it was also the first time I read *Mekton 2*. I was blown away at just how precisely the game managed to grab hold of the genre by the throat and bleed it for everything it had. *Mekton* character creation was a joyous experience. I created a character with a full melodramatic past, including his martyred parents, screwy love affair and dashing arch-rival. It was a game of high romance, adventure and excitement. We constructed the campaign with four guys and four girls in mind and came away with one year worth of gaming stories that still get my heart beating to this day.

Needless to say, *Mekton Zeta*, the next generation of the *Mekton* line, is even better than its parent. Looking at *Mekton 2* and *Zeta* (which I'm doing right now) shows me just how far the gaming industry has gone in learning how to use layout and graphics. *Zeta* is a joy to read and a marvel to look at. The graphics really capture the feel of the game and the art gives you a good impression of what this whole super-intense genre is about.

Anime was inspired by many sources, and so it seems rather mercurial at times. Here's my best attempt at telling you what a *Mekton* game can be like: It's galaxy-spanning warfare between ancient Empires. There's giant robot armor suits and swarms of missiles with swirling smoke trails and invading armies of aliens on huge world ships. The story is always bigger than life, and so you have to have heroes that are just as big. Nothing they do is small. Their skills are unmatched, their courage and athletic abilities are inhuman... and their love affairs are pure Shakespeare. Nobody has a happy love affair unless one of the two are going to die tragically and heroically.

The game system is one that many in the RPG community should be familiar with. It's the old R. Talsorian system that involves eight attributes and d10's and a simple difficulty number system that's fast and deadly. However, it isn't the system that's the charm of *Mekton*, it's the way that the game really lets you feel like you're playing in an anime.

The book begins with 8 full color pages that read just like a movie ad, complete with producer, director and screenplay credits. The emphasis here is on making the game *cinematic*. That's a very different style from most role-playing games. "*Mekton Z* is designed to simulate animation, not reality," says the beginning of the *Cinematic Roleplaying* section. Giant robot armor is just not practical in reality, but in animation, *they look cool!* And that's the whole point in *Mekton Z*. We're talking about a world where a hero can leap 30' in the air, dodge incoming laser blasts and micro-missiles, draw a katana and slice an enemy's weapon in half all in the matter of a few seconds, and he does it *in slow motion!* When players and game masters get the idea in their heads that *style* is more important than *reality*, that's when *Mekton Z* gets to be a whole lot of fun.

All those years ago, when my friend Kevin asked me to help him write up a campaign for *Mekton 2*, I really didn't know what I was getting into. I got introduced to a genre that I never had any interest in, and I helped write a year's worth of great stories. By the end of the campaign, we fought against impossible odds, and saved the Earth from alien invaders, learned "the Way" (an ancient and mystical philosophy that we stole right out from under Mr. Lucas' nose) and had found and lost true love. It was one of the most incredible role-playing experiences I've ever had, and I owe it all to R. Talsorian games. Now I can do it all over again with *Mekton Z* and introduce a *new* circle of friends to a brand new world; a world of action, adventure, drama, and romance — the world of *Mekton*.



BUILT TO APPEAL TO THE  
MELODRAMATIC HERO IN US ALL,  
MEKTON Z IS A "CINEMATIC  
ROLEPLAYING" EXPERIENCE.



**CONSPIRACY X**  
NEW MILLENNIUM ENTERTAINMENT  
\$25.00/224 PAGES  
REVIEWED BY KEVIN JONES

*In wartime, truth is so precious that she should always be attended by a bodyguard of lies.*

—Winston Churchill

*If you don't know enough, be prepared to face extreme dangers. Ignorance is deadly.*

*If you know too much, be prepared to face extreme dangers. That is the nature of conspiracies.*

—From the *Conspiracy X* rulebook

I've never watched *The X-Files*. I don't follow the UFO folklore. I'm not interested in "Grays" or "Saurians" and I really don't care what's in that mythical warehouse out in the middle of the California desert. I am, however, a student of classic conspiracy theory (that's the Illuminati, the Assassins, the Rosicrucians and the Templars, by the way) and even though they aren't even mentioned once in the new RPG *Conspiracy X* by New Millennium Games, it was still one of the most entertaining and enlightening role-playing games I've read in a long time.

The focus of the game is on alien research and conspiracy, although there's also a healthy dose of psychics and sorcery (my area of expertise) thrown in. I passed the UFO stuff by our resident expert on the subject, and he said that the data was well-researched and the original stuff was pretty insightful and creative. I can say first-hand that the same could be said about the chapters on psychic and supernatural phenomenon. It's all good.



CONSPIRACY X AIN'T NO X-FILES RIP-OFF. IT MAY BE THE PACESETTER FOR THE UPCOMING CONSPIRACY GENRE.



Now I could tell you that the system uses eight attributes and it all works on a difficulty number system that you've seen in a hundred other games, and the wound system is pretty lethal and blah blah blah.... You could learn how to use the system with your eyes closed. But if you read the mechanics that are used for luck, psychics, and magic, you'll find some real innovative thinking. I've never seen a magic/psychic system like the one used in *Conspiracy X*, and quite frankly, I've got green eyes. I wish I thought of this stuff.

But the mechanics are only a small part of the book. Most of it is background material, character generation and game master advice. The book has side bars that explain some of the more difficult concepts and give GMs tips on how to make the players paranoid in a game world that's littered with smoky, shadow-filled rooms. It presents the theories on building secret societies (ever wonder why the symbol of the Illuminati is a pyramid?) and techniques that these folks use to keep themselves secret. Great reading for any game.

PCs in *Conspiracy X* are typically agents of the secret government organization known as "Aegis." Organized into autonomous cells, Aegis agents are responsible for dealing with the alien menace, among other things. Aegis is opposed by another group known as "The Black Book." Originally built with "black project" dollars (hence the nickname) to investigate and exploit exotic technologies, this organization has ceased answering to any sort of authority. Even worse, they have formed treaties with the Saurians and the Greys. Both Aegis and The Black Book were formed in the 1940s.

*Conspiracy X* is very unlike GURPS *Illuminati*, which conspiracy gamers might also be familiar with. While they both deal with aliens, psychics and the like *Conspiracy X* has a very sinister feel about it, where the GURPS product is more lighthearted—even silly at times. To each his own of course, but I prefer sinister any day. And *Conspiracy X* delivers sinister in spades.

As a die hard conspiracy fan, I cannot recommend *Conspiracy X* enough. However, it also provides an abundance of information for any game master who may be running a modern campaign with a bit of the "unexplained." If you run any of the *World of Darkness* games, *Over The Edge*, or even some of the dark future stuff like *Cyberpunk* or *Shadowrun*, you'll want to check this one out for the source material alone. It may look like its just a "jump on the bandwagon" product on the surface, but the guys down at NME know what they're talking about. They've done the genre a service by making a slick, well-written product that exposes "outsiders" to one of my favorite genres. Just as White Wolf's "World of Darkness" line began a new era in roleplaying, products like *Conspiracy X* might be the start of the Age of Conspiracy. We can only hope...

## PSYCHICS AND MAGIC IN CONSPIRACY X

When using psychics and magic in *Conspiracy X*, you get to use those nifty Zener cards. In a nutshell, if you want to use your psychic power, you tell the GM you are using it and he asks what your rank is. Let's say it's a "2." The GM asks you if the card at the top of the deck is a star, a circle, three squiggly lines, or whatever and you tell him what you think it is. Then, he draws as many cards off the top of the deck as you have skill ranks in that power. If you're right, the skill works. If it doesn't ... you know the rest. It's quick, clean and best of all, it's cool!

## HELP SPREAD THE WORD



Do not trust this face. Say NO to deceptive alien entities. For FREE stickers send a self-addressed stamped envelope to: V2, Box 911, Stanwood, WA 98292, USA.

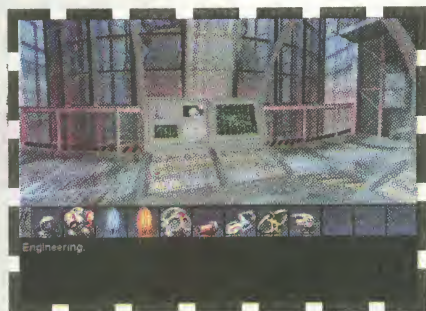
**Fear not.**  
Spread the Word.



**MISSION CRITICAL**

- LEGEND ENTERTAINMENT
- \$45 ON THE STREET
- REQUIRES: 486/33, 4MB RAM, DOS, CD-ROM, SVGA
- REVIEWED BY MATT STAROSCIK

*Mission Critical* is the latest in Legend's line of adventure games. In my opinion, it's a big step up from *Shannara*, even though the fundamentals of gameplay remain the same. As in *Shannara*, and most games in the genre, you move from place to place accumulating items that you use to solve puzzles.



In *Mission Critical* you play the sole survivor of a vicious space battle. Your ship, exploring a distant star system, are bested in combat by a UN cruiser. Yes, I said UN. In this future, it's become a tyrannical organization—the fight between the UN and the "Alliance" forms the backdrop for this game. Your commander (played by Michael Dorn) reluctantly surrenders but sneaks a fusion bomb into one of the shuttles that are moving the crew to the UN ship. He sacrifices everyone—save you, who remains on the *Lexington*—so that hopefully you alone can complete the mission. (This is all explained in the game's excellent intro. The space combat scenes are especially nice.)

With the UN ship destroyed, you are left alone in orbit around the rocky hellhole known as Persephone; this is where the game really begins. Your ultimate goal is the exploration (and exploitation) of an abandoned alien facility on the planet below. First though you're going to have to make some essential repairs to the *Lexington*, including repairing a hull breach and stabilizing the fission reactor. You'll also have to get up to speed on the *Lexington's* ship-to-ship combat systems.

I was really impressed with the *feel* of the world. If I could go buy a *Mission Critical* RPG sourcebook I'd do it in a second. The UN-Alliance war is a nice change from wars with aliens, and the way the starships look and work is guaranteed to please any hard SF fan.

*Mission Critical* is one of the better sci-fi adventure games I have seen lately, and I'd have to rate it as Legend's best title to date.



MISSION CRITICAL IS  
WORTH A CLOSER  
LOOK FOR ANY SCI-FI  
ADVENTURE FAN.

**RPG TOOLS V1.0**

- BADGERCOM SOFTWARE (BADGER@BADGERCOM.COM)
- \$47 ON THE STREET
- REQUIRES: '020 MAC, 4MB RAM, SYSTEM 7.0
- REVIEWED BY MATT STAROSCIK

I've seen a lot of RPG helper programs in the last couple of years. There seem to be a huge number of dice-rollin', table-spewin', character-keepin', scenario-managin' freeware, shareware, and payware utilities out there, for Macs and PCs. Most of them are of dubious value.

The latest one to come my way is *RPG Tools* from BadgerCom Software. It's one of the best such programs I've seen. It has the mandatory dice-rolling and table-rolling functions, or course, but its main focus is the design and management of scenarios. This is the first computerized gaming tool I've seen that would actually let you realistically organize a scenario, complete with text notes, images, and sounds. Now, to be honest it'd be a lot of work to set it all up, far more work than it would take to write it all down in a word processor or scribble notes in a notebook. Then again, word processors and notebooks don't let you build documents with hotlinks between files, or make maps that take you to information screens when you click on a room. There are also a lot of customizable parameters, like the stats used in the game, tables, encumbrance, and currency units.

*RPG Tools* uses an approach similar to the Mac Finder to organize information. A document's main window has folders in it, which might represent locations; each folder can have subfolders representing additional locations. You can also stock folders with NPCs and monsters of your own design. All these objects have custom icons to let you know at a glance what they are. The window displays it all in a list, just like "View by Name" in the Finder. Folders even have the little triangles to turn down so you can display what's inside them. There's also a Finder-like search function which will pull up a list of objects that meet criteria you set.

*RPG Tools* is a good product, but it will still be a lot of work design a complete adventure to be run from within it. If you do put in the time, though, your efforts will be rewarded... Still, when it comes time to design my next adventure it'll still probably be me, my PowerBook, Microsoft Word, and free Coke refills at McDonalds.

*Late-breaking news:* BadgerCom Software will be releasing a shareware version of *RPG Tools* as version 2.0. It will be a cross-platform, OpenDoc-compliant package. There is no firm release date yet but we'll be sure to let you know when it becomes available.



## FANTASY GENERAL

- SSI, INC.
- \$45 ON THE STREET
- REQUIRES: 486, 4MB RAM, DOS, CD-ROM, SVGA
- REVIEWED BY MATT STAROSCIK



In *Shadis* #23 we ran a review of *Allied General*, a hex-based wargame from SSI. Well, as cool as *Allied General* was, it's just been one-upped. *Fantasy General* is here, and if this can't get you interested in wargames with hexes nothing probably will. The advice I gave in the AG review applies here, only more—if you already like wargames or computer games like *Civilization* and *Master of Magic*, run out and buy FG right away. If you have been thinking about trying a "classic" counters-and-hexes wargame, this is the one.

At its core, FG is like many other wargames. You have a lot of troops with various strengths and weaknesses, and you push them around on a hex map to crush your enemies. Players alternate turns, and there may be victory conditions like "liberate the city."

There are 120 different units in the game. Each of them has a neat icon. Some troops fly, or have ranged attacks, or can cast spells. There are also four different leaders you can choose from; depending on who you pick, you gain a different ability. For example, the sorceress Mordra can magically summon some units at the beginning of every turn.

FG gives you a choice of playing in campaign mode or scenario mode. In the campaign you have to worry about allocating resources between research and troops, as well as liberating the land from the nefarious Shadowlord—one continent at a time. In contrast the scenario mode lets you fight one predefined battle, with no long-term planning. There is also an "Arena" mode so you can set up custom battles. As in AG you can play with a friend over email. The combination of custom scenarios and email play looks like a real boon for wargaming buddies who can't find the time to meet often enough.

The game's interface is well-crafted, letting you get down to the business of battle with a minimum of fuss. The manual also includes a good tutorial section. You also get pages of tables detailing the stats of each unit in the game, which comes in awfully handy when you're planning your strategy.

What was most surprising about the game was the atmosphere. The graphics are all top-notch and the story is surprisingly good for what is, after all, a wargame. I should also mention that I have never heard a better video game soundtrack than FG's. The music is mostly rearrangement of classical pieces, and was professionally recorded—there's not a note of FM or wavetable music.

Keep up the good work, SSI!

## TERRA NOVA

- LOOKING GLASS
- \$45 ON THE STREET
- REQUIRES: P-60 (THEY MEAN IT), 8MB RAM, CD-ROM
- REVIEWED BY NEIL MOULNEIMNE

If you're a fan of Heinlein's *Starship Troopers* or Shirow's *Appleseed*, you owe it to yourself to check out *Terra Nova*—the newest PC release from Looking Glass. You pilot a suit of powered armor and command up to three other squadmates on a series of special forces missions to protect your clan from a corrupt Earth empire. The interface will be familiar to anyone who's played the *Ultima Underworld* or *System Shock* games.

The real crown jewel of the game is the terrain. *Terra Nova's* terrain is probably unlike anything you've seen before. Hills and valleys, passes, plateaus, craters, lakes, ravines—in short, the terrain is so real you'll probably swear you've been somewhere that looks similar. Terrain affects nearly everything, from what you can see and hit to how you can move.

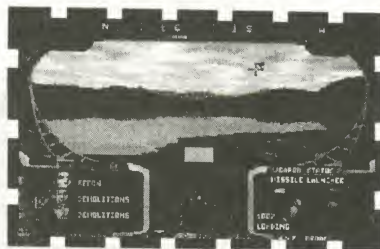
Be forewarned, however; this game is a real hog for power. The box clearly states that a Pentium-60 with 8 megs of RAM is the minimum requirement, and they mean it. A Pentium-90 with 16 megs should be considered as the baseline machine. Even so, you must run the game at the lowest resolution mode and with most all options turned off.

The gameplay is pretty straightforward. You get assigned a mission, pick your team and equipment, and drop onto the planet's surface. All your walking is handled through the keyboard, while weapon targeting and firing is done with the mouse. The game is flexible enough that you can choose to accomplish your mission with stealth, brute force, or some compromise between the two. In combat, you'll be introduced to a good assortment of weapons, including particle beams, grenades, and continuous-fire lasers. The action gets very thick at times, requiring a cool head in the most chaotic situations.

If you're looking for another variation on *Doom* you'll probably want to pass this up. However, if the thought of "making a drop" gives you goosebumps, make tracks for this game.

TERRA NOVA  
BREAKS OUT  
OF THE DOOM  
MOLD. OFTEN  
YOU GET TO

PLAY A SQUAD LEADER, AND YOU CAN  
DIRECT THE ACTIONS OF YOUR TEAM-  
MATES IN REALTIME.



WITH FLIGHT  
UNLIMITED, LOOKING  
GLASS DEVELOPED A  
REPUTATION FOR DOING  
AN INCREDIBLE JOB OF  
MODELING REAL-  
WORLD PHYSICS.  
WALKING IN TERRA  
NOVA IS NOT QUITE  
LIKE DOOM—RATHER,  
YOU HAVE TO THINK  
"TWO LEGS" TO  
REALLY GET THE BEST  
PERFORMANCE OUT OF  
YOUR POWERED  
ARMOR. YOU'LL MAKE  
SLIGHT STUMBLES  
ACROSS BROKEN  
TERRAIN, CHARGE  
RAPIDLY ACROSS FLAT  
ROADS OR DOWN  
SHALLOW SLOPES,  
AND IT FEELS RIGHT.

# SALES



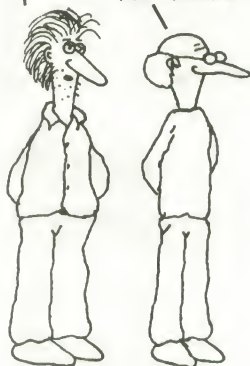
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## WEIRD PETE'S BASEMENT SPECIAL



WEIRD PETE was holding out on KODT fans everywhere! KODT#1 has been sold out for months, but stingy ol' Pete was hoarding 25 copies in the basement of his gameshop. Fortunately, Pete lost his shirt by over-purchasing cases of SPELLJACKED™ cards and needs to pay the rent.

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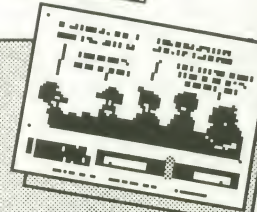


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# THE ADVENTURES OF JOE GENERO

## THE AVERAGE MAN

This month's enervating eventuality:

### JOE GOES THE DISTANCE!



#### IS THIS HOW "DANCES WITH WOLVES" GOT STARTED?

In *Werewolf* (White Wolf Games), lycanthropes can "harry" their prey, by trying to run them down—which includes our poor Joe. But don't worry; Joe can outrun a pack of wolves 25% of the time. However, there's no limit to how long harrying can go on, as long as Joe and the dogs stay neutral in the dice pool contest—theoretically, the chase could go on forever...



#### WHO IS JOE?

Joe Genero is the "Average Man". His attributes are average. His skills are average. His rolls are average.\* He is the unsung hero of role-playing games!

What chance does Joe stand against your garden-variety cybered techno-magic users? It all depends on the rules you use... Suffice to say, the odds are good that if Joe can do it, then you can do it too!

\*Joe's rolls are calculated using statistical functions, esp. DeMoivre's Central Limit Theorem for 95% certainty of results. Where possible, discrete values of time and distance have been converted to continuous units. (I.E., we got decimals!)



#### WHEN IT ABSOLUTELY, POSITIVELY HAS TO BE THERE OVERNIGHT...

In *Champions* (Hero Games), Joe can carry a fifty-five pound weight and run at his top speed of 14.4 miles per hour—and never get tired!

#### ...HENCE THE TERM, "POWER NAP"

In *GURPS* (Steve Jackson Games, Inc.), Joe can exhaust himself to total unconsciousness yet become completely refreshed after less than two hours of sleep. In *Rolemaster* (Iron Crown Enterprises), no matter how wiped out Joe gets, he's completely refreshed after only a half-hour nap.



"The Adventures of Joe Genero, The Average Man" is ©1996 J.A. Holmgren and Sanguine Productions Limited. All rights reserved. Nobody rip anything off, okay?

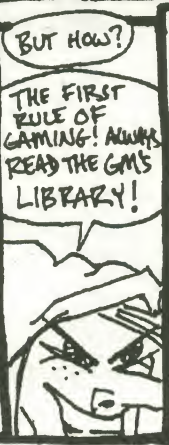
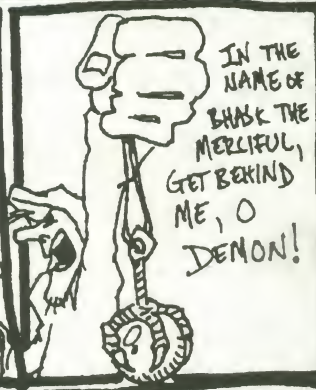


# DIRK—THE ONGOING MISADVENTURES OF A WAYWARD YOUTH TRAPPED IN A FANTASY WORLD OF HIS OWN DESIGN.



BY ALLAN SMITHEE  
AND THE FREAK FORCE

©1996





# FINIEOUS FINGERS & FRIENDS

Searching for clues about Fin's disappearance, Boredflak the Mighty Bolt-Lobber takes an informant to a bar that's popular with thieves.

WHAT THE—! SMEADE WENT OUT OF BUSINESS?

SMEADE'S THE  
A Wretched Hive of Scum and Villainy

APPARENTLY THIS BAR WAS TOO POPULAR WITH THIEVES.

Boredflak and the informant go to a popular chain of taverns geared towards the modern dungeon-delver...

T.G.I.  
ARAGORN'S  
WHERE EVERYBODY KNOWS YOUR TRUE NAME

NOW TELL ME ABOUT THE HOBBITS, GEORGE.

WELL, IT STARTS LIKE EVERY OTHER STORY IN THIS TOWN WITH CRIME.

"WE HIT UPON THE PERFECT SCAM: SELLING CURSED SWORDS TO GULLIBLE ADVENTURERS, TELLING THEM THEY WERE MADE OF MITHRIL OR TUNGSTEN-CARBIDE OR WHATEVER. SOME PEOPLELL BELIEVE ANYTHING."

"THEN THEY SHOWED UP: THE HOBBIT VAMPIRES. THEY NEEDED MONEY TO CONTINUE THEIR DECADENT YET TASTEFULLY ELEGANT LIFESTYLES."

"AT FIRST, THEY TRIED TO USE THEIR EVIL MIND POWERS ON US, BUT WE DWARVES ARE A STUBBORN, IMPERTURABLE LOT."

IT WAS THEN WE DISCOVERED THAT HOBBIT VAMPIRES ARE POSSESSED OF INSANE STRENGTH. THAT CLINCHED IT."

NOW WE ARE FORCED TO SLAVE AWAY IN THE DARK MINES ALL DAY.

YOU'RE A DWARF. YOU LIKE SLAVING AWAY IN DARK MINES ALL DAY.

WELL, YEAH. WHAT'S YOUR POINT?



HMM... SO THE HOBBIT VAMPIRES  
REALLY **DO** RUN THIS TOWN. BUT  
THAT STILL DOESN'T EXPLAIN  
WHAT'S HAPPENED TO OL' FIN...



HELLO AND WELCOME TO  
T.G.J. ARAGORNS! HOW MANY  
ARE IN YOUR PARTY?



**FORTY-  
THREE.**

DO YOU HAVE A  
**RESERVATION?**

WE DON'T  
**NEED ONE.**



I SEE. AND WAS  
THAT **SMOKING OR  
NON-AAIEEE!!**

I HOPE  
YOU NOTED WHERE THE  
**EXITS ARE, 'CUZ HERE'S THE  
EMERGENCY...**



Meanwhile, at the Industrial Complex of  
the Space Empire, Finieous Fingers  
and Jacqueline d'Chien attempt to  
escape from the Imperial Citadel...



SIR, OUR MEN HAVE  
SEARCHED EVERYWHERE. THEY  
**MUST HAVE ENTERED THE  
EMPEROR'S HALL.**



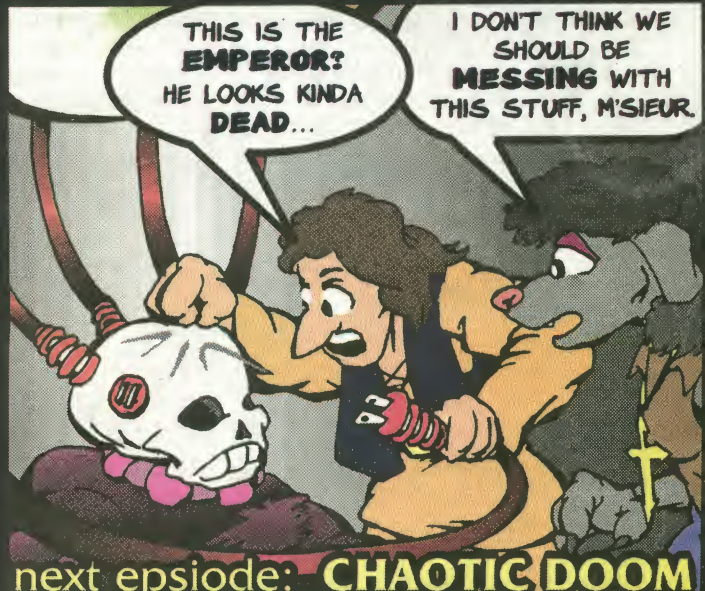
THEN  
THEY HAVE **DIED,**  
SERGENT.

OUR MIGHTY  
EMPEROR HAS  
**LIFE BEYOND  
DEATH! THEY  
WOULD BE NO  
MATCH FOR HIS  
PSYCHIC  
POWER!**



THIS IS THE  
**EMPEROR?**  
HE LOOKS KINDA  
**DEAD...**

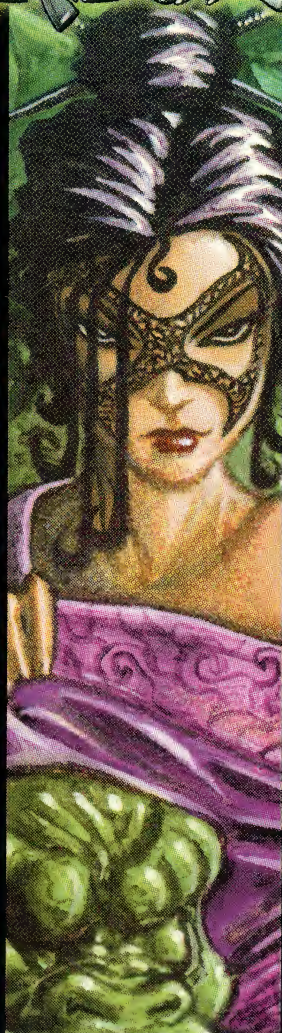
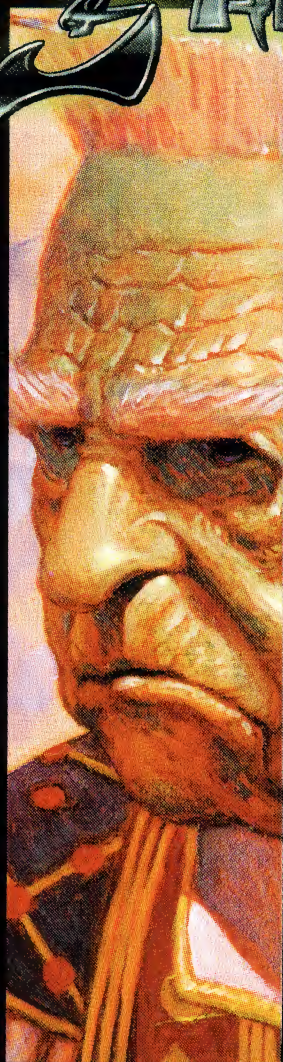
I DON'T THINK WE  
SHOULD BE  
**MESSING WITH  
THIS STUFF, M'SIEUR.**



next episode: **CHAOTIC DOOM**



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Naga ...

The  
return of the  
Scorpion ...

... and the  
fall of a  
Champion.

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Now**



**Our revenge shall be an eternity of  
darkness!**



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AN ANCIENT EVIL AWAKENS.



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